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"THIS WISDOM MUST DIE!"

15¢

SHORT NOVEL
by David H. Keller



INTERFERENCE
by
Walter C. Davies

COSMIC STORIES

VOLUME 3

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FIRE - POWER

NOVELETTE

by S. D. Gottesman

(Author of "Dead Center," "Dimension of Darkness," etc.)

What can be done when all the battle-strength of a democracy is concentrated in the hands of a cosmic navy with dictatorial ambitions? That was the problem Bartok of the Intelligence Wing faced and had to answer.

CHAPTER I

TINY, TRIM, Babe MacNeice descended the very secret staircase that led into the very private office of Intelligence Wing Commander Bartok.

"Hello!" he gasped as the wall panel slid aside. "You're on Magdeburg's 83—or aren't you?"

"There was very little doing there," she smiled, seating herself. "Except a bustle and rolling about as I left. It seems that someone had kidnapped their HQ secretary and sweated him for some information relative to their new interceptors."

"Have they any idea," asked Bartok anxiously, "who that someone was?"

Babe laughed. "They have the finger on him. From some confidential instructions he dropped while making a getaway they learned that he was secret agent for some Venusian colony or other. He was described as a thin old man of effeminate carriage and manner."

Bartok smiled, relieved. "Your number twelve. Report, please." He started a phonograph turning and pointed the mike at Babe.

The girl said chattily: "MacNeice went per orders to Magdeburg's 83 for confirmation or denial of rumors concerning a planned uprising against Terrestrial authority. There she found widespread reports of similar character; the entire planet was flooded with propaganda.

"Information was conclusively—ah—secured—from an official to the effect that the colonial governor, Allison by name, was fomenting an insurrection by means of which he would be able to assume supreme authority over the planet and defend it against terrestrial forces. That is all." She lit a cigarette and stared dully at the floor as the wing commander sealed and labeled the report record.

"That," said Bartok, "sews up Allison in a very uncomfortable sack. We'll send a cruiser tonight."

"Sure," said the girl. "He hasn't got a chance. None of them have against the insidious Commander Bartok and his creatures of evil. That's me."

"And don't tell me you don't love it," he grinned. "I know better. In the blood, that's where it is—the congenital urge to pry into other people's affairs and never be suspected. It gives us a kick like two ounces of *novadyn*."

"Speaking of which," said Babe, "are you dining alone tonight?"

"Nope. I have a standing date with my favorite little *voyeur* whenever she comes back to Earth. Scamper along to get dressed; I'll meet you in two hours at the living statues."

THE SHOW-PLACE of New Metropole, capital of the All Earth Union and Colonies, was the Square of Living Statues. Bathed in ever-changing lights, the groups of three men and three women, moulded from the purest gold and silver and assembled with every artifice of the year A. D. 3880, changed steps and partners, moving through the hours of the day in a stately dance that was never twice the same in even the smallest step.

Grouped on a lofty platform the heroically proportioned figures were the focus of every visitor to the wonder-city of all time and space. There was absolutely nothing like them in the universe, nothing like their marvelous grace that would balance a three-ton male on his toes while whirling a two-ton female partner in a vast arc, all to the most subtly exquisite music that could be evolved from supertheramins and electroviolins. The music too was completely automatic. The divine harmonies came from nothing more than a revolving drum which selected at random sequences of tones and the companion coloring of the lights that flooded the statues in their dance.

In a glassed restaurant Bartok and Babe were dining. Through the walls filtered enough of the music to furnish a subdued background to lovers' talk. But when these two got together it was business. As the wing commander had said, it was something in the blood.

"MacNeice," snapped Bartok, "I am not arguing with you, I'm telling you. You are not going to do any such

damfool thing as walk in on our piratical friends and confront them with what you doubtless think of as 'The Papers'. I'm going to get this melodrama out of your head if I have to beat it out."

The girl's face was flushed and angry. "Try that and you'll get yours with an Orban," she snapped. "I say that if you bring it right home to them that we're on their tails they'll give up without a struggle and we've saved so many lives and so much fuel that a medal for me will be in order."

"The cruiser," said Bartok, "leaves tonight. And that settles everything. Forget, child, that this wing of the service was once its brains instead of its eyes and ears. We are now officially an appendage devoted to snooping, and the glorious history of the Intelligence Division is behind us."

"Fitzjames," she muttered, gritting her teeth. "I'd like to take that Admiral of the Fleet by his beard and tear his head off. And don't tell me you aren't in the project body and soul." Mocking his tones she said: "I know better."

"Off the record," admitted Bartok, "I may opine that our tiny suite of offices has more brains in its charladies' little fingers than the entire fighting forces have in all the heads of all the commanders of all their mile-long battlewagons. That is, naturally, gross overstatement and pure sentimentality on my part. Eat your Marsapples and shut up."

She bit viciously into one of the huge fruit and swallowed convulsively, her eyes drifting through the glass wall to the living statues. They were performing a sort of minuet, graceful beyond words, to an accompaniment from the theramins in the manner of Mozart.

"And what's more," barked the wing commander in an angry afterthought, "the body of the space navy could dispense with us at will, whereas without them we'd be lost. You can't exist for the purpose of making reports to nobody. What good would your spying have done if there hadn't been any cruiser to be sent off to bomb Allison's capital city?"

"None at all," she snapped at him. "Only I don't like the job if it has to mean taking guff from every half-witted ensign who graduated because he knows how to work an Auto-Crammer. Barty, you know and I know that they hate us and check up on everything we send in. The—the sneaks!" Abruptly she was weeping. The wing commander, indecisively, passed her a handkerchief. Women! he was thinking. Sometimes they could be thoroughly opaque to reason. Any man could see through his sardonic recital of rules. The wing commander detested the well-set-up officers and gentlemen who would not and could not move until he had charted the course. The wing commander had a healthy contempt for any and all formality and routine, with which the naval service was weighed down as with tons of lead. But the wing commander was, first, last and always, of that unalterable cast of mind which makes the superb, chilled-steel military spy.

IN ALL THE RECORDS of the All Earth Union and Colonies navy, there had probably been no such man as Bartok. Back to the days of the Herkimer scandal there had been a succession of brilliantly proved men in his office, but for resourcefulness and the spy's temperament he had had no equal.

He would have gone far in the old days; further than any intelligence man now could. Many years ago, when Earth had only a few hundred colonial planets, the news suddenly broke that there was a virtual dictatorship over the navy by the Intelligence Wing. Herkimer, since painted as a scoundrel of the deepest dye, had been merely an exceptionally enthusiastic officer.

The course his enthusiasm ran included incidentally the elimination of much red tape in the form of unfriendly fleet officers; that he regretted as unfortunate and even tragic. But his mission of expanding Earth's culture and civilization to the stars would not brook interference. Classic scholars could scarcely avoid a comparison with the Roman em-

peror Trajan, who pushed the bounds of the Empire to the absolute limits of the Western world, and created a situation which hastened the fall of Rome by centuries.

Since the Herkimer affair they had been very careful with the Intelligence Wing. Once it was almost abolished for good; a few years of operation of the fleet practically blind, with no ground laid for them or information of enemy movements proved that to be impractical. But they did what they could to keep the spies within bounds. It was an actually heart-breaking situation to the executives of the Wing. But you can't keep the *voyeur* instinct down; that was what they were chosen for and that was how they operated.

Take this affair on Magdeburg's 83. It was an insignificant outer planet very far away from New Metropole. Yet the filtering of rumors brought it into the brilliant limelight of the Wing. The body of the fleet could not move less than a mile-long battle-wagon at one time; the Wing — personified by Commander Bartok — dispatched tiny, trim Babe MacNeice. She returned with the information that a hitherto trusted colonial officer had decided to play Napoleon and was secretly fortifying the planet.

In the last analysis, lives were saved. The single cruiser could send a landing party and take the trusted colonial officer back to Earth for trial; surely a preferable alternative to a minor war with the propaganda-inflamed ophidians that were native to the planet.

Wing executives did not speak—in private—of their love for the body of the fleet. They held to the stubborn conviction that there was nothing dumber than a flag-ship commander, nothing less beautiful than a flag-ship.

CHAPTER II

AT ABOUT that time, things were popping on the Line-ship *Stupendous*, two million miles off the orbit of Venus. On it was jammed the entire Headquar-

ters Wing of the All Earth and Colonies navy. In the very heart of the ship, inside almost a cubic mile of defensive and offensive power, was Wing Commander Fitzjames, by virtue of his command Admiral of the Fleet.

"Not a murmur," he said to his confidential secretary, a man named Voss. "Not a murmur from the crew." He lolled back in his chair and breathed easier under his chestful of medals.

"They don't know," said Voss. "When they find out—!"

"Stick to your shorthand, son," snapped the Admiral. "When they find out they'll keep on carrying out orders very much the way they always have. They're picked men on this ship. Now take this down: General Order to all Lineship Commanders. By authority of the Admiral you are empowered to govern any and all citizens and subjects of All Earth. An emergency has arisen which makes it absolutely necessary to eliminate opposition to this program. Your direct superior is your Wing Commander, who is responsible only to ranking members of the Headquarters Wing. A list of proscribed persons will follow."

The Admiral lit a cigar with an unsteady hand. "Code that," he said. "Send it in twenty minutes."

"Anything else?" asked the secretary. "How about the Wing Commanders? Are you coming clean with them?"

Fitzjames stared at the metal ceiling. "Take this: Confidential Memorandum to Wing Commanders. From Admiral of the Fleet Fitzjames. You are hereby notified that the Headquarters Wing of the fleet has voted to take over power from the hands of the Executive Committee of All Earth. You are on your honor as officers and gentlemen to support this move by your brothers in arms. You will continue to patrol your regular sectors, having dispatched details to attend to the physical acts of taking power. No planet must be left under a Colonial Governor acting by right of a charter from the Exec All Earth. Details follow. Report to *Stupendous* immediately

in code. We are seizing Venus as a base."

"Right," said Voss. "So go ahead and seize it."

"We're on our way," said the Admiral heavily.

Depending on where you were to see the affair, the seizing of Venus was either a trivial or a Jovian episode. From space, for example, all there was to see was the bulk of the lineship slipping its length into the clouds above the dawnstar and vanishing from sight. But from the city of Astarte, principal freight port of the planet, it was vastly impressive.

Above the towers and loading-peaks of the yards there appeared the most gigantic of all the spaceships in the universe, covering the town like a roof over its roofs.

There were a couple of smoke-bombs dropped into the streets and a few old-fashioned radios exploded under the power of the monster ship's sending tubes that announced that the city was taken and would be hostage for the rest of the planet's good behavior. Landing parties went down by lighter ships to establish order and arrange several necktie parties in which the Colonial Governor had the stellar role, minor parts being taken by his subordinates and clerks. Venusian natives were warned off the streets; henceforth none but the Earthborn could show their faces by daylight. Plans were announced to transport the verminous natives to the Darkside District. All this took exactly six hours, Earth time.

A BRIEF RESUME of the life of Alexander Hertford III, Captain of the Fleet and Commander of Patrol Wing Twenty-Three would include many revealing facts relative to the situation of the moment.

As he lay comfortably sprawled on a divan aboard his lineship *Excalibur*, a capital fighting vessel of standard offensive and defensive equipment, he was a fine figure of a man in his uniform of purple and gold. The collar was open, which, with his tumbled curls hanging over his brow in the manner of an ancient

Irish *glib*, gave him a dashing, devil-may-care expression. At least Miss Beverly deWinder thought so, for she was smoothing those tumbled curls and smiling maternally.

Leaving the commander's ship—which was stationed off Rigel—for a moment, we take a brief survey of his career. He was thirty years old, and his grandfather, the first of his name, was also in the Navy. His father was not as bright as his grandfather, but appointments were easily got from the sentimental All Earth Exec, which wished to breed a race of fighting men, true, loyal and hard as nails. Alexander Hertford II just got through Prep Wing and Training Wing by the skin of his teeth, lived on a lineship and died at his post quelling an uprising among the outer planets of Alpha Centauri.

The third of the name was definitely dull. However, by the virtue of the anonymous genius who invented the Autocram and peddled them to students, he got through with what could easily be mistaken for flying colors, won his commission, saw service and was promoted to a Wing Command.

Life in Prep Wing and Training Wing was Spartan in the extreme. Tradition was extensively cultivated; for example it was legitimate to steal anything edible and criminal to steal anything drinkable. Another of the blunders of the career-moulding branch of the Navy was the policy of rigidly excluding females from the lives of the boys and men for the duration of the course. Thus it was no more than natural that after graduating they got their romance in heavy doses.

The end-product of this was sprawling off Rigel when a discreet tapping sounded on the door of the Commander's lounge.

"I'll see, sweetie," said Miss deWinder, who was a good-hearted girl. She took the slip of paper that poked through the slot and carried it to Alexander Hertford III.

He opened it and read.

"Damn," said Alexander Hertford III.

"Wassa matta, sweetie pie? Did

bad ol' Admiral sen' sweetie pie away f'om li'l Bevvie-wevvie?"

Sweetie pie opened a closet whose inner face was a mirror and adjusted his collar and hair. As he cocked his cap at the right fraction of an angle he said: "Nothing to worry about. You just sit tight. I may not be back for a few days—we're seeing action again." He re-read the slip of paper.

"Damn," he marvelled again. "When we used to talk about it around the mess-tables I never thought it'd come in my time. But here it is. Beverly, sweet, the Navy's taking over. Your lover-boy isn't a flying policeman anymore." He buckled on his belt and opened the lap of the handgun holster. There was a look of strain on his dumb, handsome face. "From now on," he said, "your lover-boy is ruler, and no questions asked, over Cosmic Sector Twenty-Three, with full power of life and death."

Miss deWinder echoed after him, fascinated: "And no questions asked . . ."

THE DECODE CLERK at Intelligence Wing read off the message he had just received and set into English. Working like an automaton he was grasping its meaning for the first time, though it had been a full quarter-hour's labor to untangle the quadruply alternating cipher. He read; he understood at last; he whistled a long, slow whistle of amazement.

In agitated tones he snapped at an office girl: "This is for Barty and nobody else. Give it to him and run, because there's going to be an explosion."

He reread the slip of paper: "—hereby notified that the Headquarters Wing has . . ." He folded and sealed the slip.

The office girl stood back a few yards to watch the Commander's face. Alternately it registered disgust and amazement as he read and reread the slip. "Scat!" he finally choked at her, with an imperious gesture.

Alone in his office with Babe Mac-

Neice he shoved the slip across his desk, his face working.

She read it and looked up, frankly puzzled. "So what?" Babe demanded. "It's a general order, memo—whatever you want to call it. Why the skillful simulation of epilepsy?"

"You don't know," he groaned, burying his head in his hands. "Women, children, imbeciles and men who haven't passed through the Prep and Training Wings. I'd be just like them if I hadn't had the spy kink from birth and been through the Training Section of the Wing I now command. You don't know, Babe, what your typical Navy officer is like.

"Once for an experiment they tried sending some Rigelians—who are very much like genus homo except that they haven't any internal organs—all highly organized custard inside—to Training. Would those long-headed beauties let them stay? Nope—tradition. It was a school for gentlemen, scholars—by virtue of the Autocram—and Terrestrials exclusively. Things are so bad now that you have to be direct descendant of a previous student before they admit you. All Earth Exec—blah! Democratic, but soft-headed and sentimental.

"When these prize beauties get into power they'll make such a hash of our beautiful colonial system—!" He was nearly weeping.

Babe MacNeice rose from her chair with gleaming eyes. "Well," she yelled at the man, "don't just sit there! What are you going to do about it?" He looked up. "Yes," she snapped. "I said *do*. Here you are sitting pretty with a corner on all the brains in the Navy, with the most loyal staff of any commander and you just snivel about what those imbeciles plan for the future. If you feel so damn broken-up about it why don't you stop them?"

Bartok was looking at her with amazed eyes. Women, he decided, were wonderful. No false sentiment about them; something about their ugly biological job must make them innate fact-facers. Of course some man would have to find them the

facts to face, but neither sex was perfect.

"Babe," he said wonderingly, "I believe you have it." He sprang to his feet. "Fitzjames," he barked, "and the rest of his crew are going to curse the days they were born when I'm through with them. Now let's get down to brass tacks, kid. I have under me about three thousand first-class Intelligence men, one thousand women. My office staff is four hundred. Lab resources—all my men have private labs; for big-scale work we borrow equipment from the University. Armament, every first-class operative owns a hand-gun and shells. Most of them carry illegal personal electric stunners. Rolling stock—two thousand very good one-man ships that can make it from here to Orion without refueling and about five hundred larger ships of various sizes. All ships unarmed. Servicing for the ships is in the hands of the local civilian authorities wherever we land. Good thing that we take fuel like civilian and private ships. Oh yes—our personnel is scattered pretty widely through the cosmos. But we can call them in any time by the best conference-model communications hookup in space. And that's that."

"It sounds good, Barty," said the girl. "It sounds very good to me. How about the rest of them?"

The Wing Commander looked very sick suddenly. "Them," he brooded. "Well, to our one division they have twenty-six, each with a flagship of the line. They have twenty-six bases—including graving-docks, repair-shops, maintenance crews, fuel, ammunition and what-have-you—and innumerable smaller ships and boats.

"And, Babe, they have one thing we haven't got at all. Each and every ship in the numbered patrol wings of the Navy mounts at least one gun. The lineships, of which there are eighty-two, mount as many as a hundred quick-fire repeaters and twenty loading ordnance pieces, each of which could blow a minor planet to hell and gone. They have guns and we have minds."

The girl rested her chin in her

hands. "Brainpower versus firepower," she brooded. "Winner take all."

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST CLASH came two weeks later off Rigel. Alexander Hertford III, Commander of Patrol Wing Twenty-Three, was apprised of the startling facts as he awoke from a night (theoretically) of revelry with Miss deWinder.

Rubbing the sleep from his baby-blue eyes, he yawned: "Impossible. There aren't any capital ships other than those in the navy. There's some silly mistake. You must have decoded it all wrong."

"Impossible, commander," said the orderly respectfully. "And it wasn't sent wrong either. They repeated several times."

The commander stared at the slip which bore the incredible message from Cruiser DM 2. "As regard orders to pacify star-cluster eight, your district, impossible to proceed. Unrecognizable lineship heavily armed warned us away. When asked for section and command they replied 'Section One, Command of Reason.' Instruct. The Commanding Officer, DM 2."

With one of those steel-spring decisions for which the Navy personnel is famous, he abruptly ordered: "My compliments to what's his name, the pilot and navigator. We're going to relieve DM 2 and see what those asses think they've found."

In just the time he took to dress and bid Miss deWinder a cheery though strained good morning, the ship was hauling alongside the cruiser. After an exchange of salutations, the commanding officer of the cruiser, frankly angry, yelled at Hertford (over the communications system): "Use your own damned eyes, commander. You can't miss the damned thing—biggest damned ship I ever saw in my damned life!"

"Captain," said the commander, "you're over-wrought. Lie down and we'll look about." He was on what they called the bridge, a vast arc of

a room which opened, for effect, on the very hull of the ship. Vast, sweepingly curved plates of lucostruc opened on the deeps of space, though scanner discs would have been structurally sounder.

Taking an angry turn about the bridge he snapped at the lookout: "Have you found that lunatic's chimera yet?" For, be it known, there is no such thing as blundering on a spaceship. You have to do some very involved calculating to blunder on a sun, and even so luck must be on your side. In short, unless this mythical lineship chose to show itself there wasn't one chance in a thousand and thousand of its being located.

"Can't see any chimera, commander," said the lookout, one straining eye glued to a telescope. "But right there's the biggest, meanest fighting ship I've ever struck eyes to." He yielded to the commander, who stared incredulously through the 'scope.

By God, it was there. By all the twelve planets, so it was. The thing was bigger than the *Excalibur*, Hertford's ship. It floated very far away and could be spotted only by the superb display of illumination they'd put on, with taunting intent, it seemed to the commander.

"Battle stations!" he yelled immediately. "Ready full fire-power."

The lookout spoke into a mike and stood by.

"GET IN TOUCH with him," snapped the commander. "When you get his wavelength give me the speaker. I'll talk to him direct, whoever he is." Through his mind were running confused visions of the glorious old days of piracy, when his grandfather had so nobly fought in a ship a tenth the size of his own, to crush the mighty federation of the gentlemen of fortune. "And," he said aloud, "by God they did it."

The entire ship was buzzing confusedly with rumor. Each and every one of the crew of a thousand and the marines who numbered half had his own private theory half an hour after the strange lineship had been

sighted. These ranged from the improbably accurate notion that it was a rebel against the navy who was going to raise some hell, to the equally absurd notion that the commander himself was the rebel and that the Admiral had sent his best ship to punish him. The truth, of course, was too obvious to be guessed by anybody.

As the ship was readied for battle it seemed to draw in on itself, like a crouching tiger. Its skin seemed to be too small for it. Men stood as if rooted to the metal floor-plates, but they quivered in tune with the accumulating mass-energy of the drivers.

A fighting ship is built around its guns, therefore a word about these may not be out of place. The *Excalibur* had the most modern of armaments. From every imaginable spot in its hide there could extrude the spaceship equivalent of old sea-going "murder guns." Disgusted gunners gave that name to the little quick-firers with which they picked off floating men and boats.

The *Excalibur's* "murder guns" were about a yard long with a caliber of three inches between the lands. They were loaded with shells exploding on time; it would be murder indeed to leave a score or more of contact shells floating unexploded in space. The rate of fire from these little killers was adjusted from single-shot to ten a second and never a jam from the loading mechanism.

There were intermediate guns as well, but more for their own sake than for any practical use. The twelve-inch shells from these could blow a destroyer out of space, but who ever heard of a line-ship fighting a destroyer? However, if the occasion should arise, they were there, about twenty of them scattered throughout the ship, covering every second of curved surface.

Finally there were the Big Guns. These were the reason for building the *Excalibur* or anything like it. The rest of the ship was designed to service those guns, store their ammunition, shelter the men who worked them, move them about in

space, and protect them from harm. The Big Guns were really big, so there was no need for more than four of them. Two fore and two aft were sufficiently heavy armament for any ship. One of these four happened to be out of commission on Hertford's ship. That, he thought bitterly, would count heavily against him in the fight that was coming.

"**A**IM GUN II, Aft," said the commander. There had been no answer from the mocking fighting ship that had suicidally turned on every light it had. The thing was still in plain view. Hertford did not draw nearer or even move for fear he would be spotted. It was enough that he knew where his nameless foe was.

"Fire," said Hertford, "when ready."

From the magazine in the heart of the ship there slid along frictionless runways barrel-like capsules of propulsive burner compound, which consisted of big-molecule acid and base which combined, in the presence of a catalyst, and released monstrous clouds of gas in the fraction of a second. Following the capsules there slid the Shell, approximately the size of a three-story suburban villa.

Loading machinery, that looked as though it could be utilized in off moments to build universes, fitted the shell into the breech and rammed it home, shoved after it the burner compound that would shoot it on its way.

And all this while, in the quarter of the ship devoted to fire-control, two hundred men had been sighting, resighting, calculating and recalculating at batteries of machines to whom the integrator was as the amoeba is to the mastodon.

The point is this: that Shell couldn't possibly miss, because to avoid it, the colossal bulk of the nameless enemy would have had to begin moving only a second after the order to fire when ready had been delivered. It was violating every rule of warfare, and, the fire-control men were confident, it would not survive the error.

The Gun finally moved on delicately jeweled bearings. This was going to be the most direct hit of all time. Cubic yards of metal locked it in position.

Metallically, over the loudspeaker: "Ready to fire, commander."

The commander: "Then fire!"

There are no words to describe the discharge of a Big Gun and the progress of a Shell through space towards a goal. But that mile-long battlegewagon was rocked like a sapling in a hurricane. When the initial shock was over the reeling commander clung to a stanchion and glued his eye to the telescope fixed on the nameless enemy.

It still glowed with lights; it still seemed to be a shade bigger than the *Excalibur*. The feelings of the commander, subtly schooled to brutality and murder, were mostly of exultation as he saw the Shell enter the field of the telescope. Now, he thought, they would be frantically dashing about as it drew nearer and desperately trying and trying to move a mass that could not be moved in less time than it would take the Shell to contact it and explode.

Two seconds . . . one second . . . half-quarter-eighth—

"What the hell?" asked the commander with a childish hurt air. He scratched his head, and as he scratched it his lineship, the *Excalibur*, disintegrated in a tangled, pulverized hell of metal, plastic, flesh, bone, Miss Beverly deWinder, two hundred fire-control men, operating crew of a thousand, half that number of marines and Commander Alexander Hertford III. They never knew what hit them, but it was their own Shell.

CHAPTER IV

NEW METROPOLE, capital of Earth and, before the Navy took over, capital of the All Earth Union and Colonies, was being pacified. This is done by lighter-loads of marines and fighting sailors who descend from a lineship hanging ominously over the most highly populated portion of the city. The lineship itself does not de-

scend because an uncalled bluff is worth more than a called one and because the battlegewagons cannot land from the moment they are launched to the moment they are scrapped except in graving docks, and the nearest to Earth was at Alpha Centauri.

Marines swarmed through the streets in the traditional manner of rightist revolutionaries. Should a face appear that hinted of Rigelian blood, or should a half-breed with the abnormally long hands and black teeth of a Betelgeusian pass the marines, there would be bloodshed and no questions asked. After a few hours of the reign of terror, the extraterrestrials crept into cellars and stayed there for the duration.

The All Earth Executive Committee was imprisoned pending trial; trial for what was never made clear. Communications sending sets were declared provisionally illegal; anyone caught with one in working commission would suffer death. The only etheric voice that could be legally heard was the light, mocking one of Voss, personal secretary to Admiral Fitzjames, and that only from the powerful sender aboard the Admiral's ship *Stupendous*, floating grimly above the Bronx.

The receiving code set in the communications room of the little suite of offices once occupied by the Intelligence Wing was clicking like a mad thing, and never an answer came, for the Wing had moved out lock, stock and barrel. The message that kept repeating (Admiral Fitzjames had said: "Keep trying" two days ago) was: "Why don't you answer, Intelligence Wing? Bartok report immediately aboard *Stupendous* to show cause why you should not be removed from office and the Wing disbanded. Why don't you answer, Intelligence Wing? Bartok report—" et cetera.

A squad of marines would shortly break into the office and find nothing of interest to anybody.

But there were two people who seemed to be partly Rigelian from the greenish patches on their faces and their peculiar scalp-lines, shaped like tipsy S's. They were cowering in a cellar as many other Rigelians

were doing during those lunatic days when the Navy had first taken over, but there was something purposeful and grim about their behavior that didn't fit the disguises.

Babe MacNeice was tinkering despondently with the central control panel of the conference-type communications system exclusive to the Intelligence Wing. The panel was a little thing, like a book in size and shape, but its insides were so fearfully complicated that nothing short of an installations engineer could make anything of them. And the panel was definitely shot to hell.

She said as much, and burst into a flood of tears. Bartok, the other Rigelian, snarled softly and handed over a mussed handkerchief. "Take it easy," he snapped, his own nerves raw and quick with strain. "We're sitting pretty compared with the rest of the office staff."

The brave smile that always ended the weeping spells flashed out as she returned the handkerchief. "What now?" she demanded tremulously. "Now that we can't keep in touch with the rest of the men?"

"Now," he said slowly, "I don't know. But—" He snatched at her wrist and dragged her behind a pillar as the door of their cellar swung open and a streak of light shot through the gloom. The profile of a marine's cap showed against the light. Bartok raised his handgun, resting the long barrel across his left forearm, pioneer-sharpshooter style.

The door opened fully. The marine called: "Come on out or I'll shoot!" That was on general principles. It was surprising how many fell for the centuries-old dodge. Then when the hider came out the marines would have a little innocent fun with their handguns and depart for other cellars.

Babe sneezed. The marine started and Bartok shot him through the head. "Come on," he snapped in an undertone as he tore off the Rigelian wig. "Through the window, Babe, and try to forget you're a lady!"

THE HUE and cry has been called the most shameful tradition of

genus homo; for generations it had been abandoned in favor of more civilized and efficient methods, such as teletype alarms and radio squad-cars. Now, in the taking-over by the Navy, the dishonorable tradition was revived as a further testimony that this taking-over was nothing short of barbarism once you sheared it of the nickelplate of the lineships and the gold braid dripping from officers' shoulders.

Behind the two fleeing people poured a ragged mob of marines and sailors, roaring inarticulate things about what they would do to the sneaking murderers when they caught them.

Luckily—in a way—an officer of the Navy popped from a doorway armed to the teeth and charging them to surrender. This they gladly did as he stood off the mob with his weapons.

They found themselves at last in a lighter, one of the small boats connected to the *Stupendous*. In an off-hand way, as the boat left the ground, the officer said: "I recognized you, you know."

"Really?" asked Babe, frozen-faced.

"Not you," he hastily explained. "But Commander Bartok—I've seen his picture. Did you know you were proscribed, Commander?"

"I assumed so," answered the commander dryly. The officer—an ensign—was very young and callow. The hard lines were growing about his mouth, though. When he could call this "pacification" without laughing out loud, thought Bartok, he'd be a real Navy man.

"How's everything going?" asked the commander. "Would you know how the campaign's progressing in other parts?"

The ensign, seemingly delighted to converse on equal terms with a Wing Commander, even though a proscribed one, drew nearer—or as much nearer as he could, in the windowless, tiny, completely enclosed compartment that was the load-space of the lighter, and grinned: "Some dashed mysterious things have been happening, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you johnnies in Intelligence were behind them."

He shifted uneasily beneath Bartok's steady, piercing stare. "You needn't look at me like that," he complained. "Even if it isn't true it's the official non-official news—if you understand me." He chuckled.

Bartok moved swiftly then, clutching the ensign by the throat and bringing an elbow into his midriff. The ensign, not wholly taken by surprise, apparently, drew his gun and fired.

THEY DRAGGED his bloody body—he had been shot in the face, and it had run all over the enclosed space—from the lighter a few minutes later. Babe was having an hysterical attack and the ensign frantically signalled to the sailors who took in the boat to relieve him of her. The engineer of the little craft came from his cubbyhole in the bow and took her by the arm, led her away from the mess on the floor.

"Poor girl," said the ensign. "She must have loved him terribly."

To follow Babe MacNeice, after the first torrential outburst she was dry-eyed, but there was a catch in her voice when she spoke: "Where are you taking me?"

"To the O. D., lady. he'll route you."

The Officer of the Day decided that she was important enough to go directly to the Admiral.

In the super-sumptuous office of Fitzjames she thought at first that she was alone, but a snaky individual who had a knack of blending in with the furniture, as if he didn't want to be seen, coughed tentatively.

She eyed him up and down. "You," she said, "must be the Satanic Mr. Voss."

He cocked an eyebrow at her. "Indeed? How so?"

"It's no secret that you're the one who started the—the taking-over."

"I defy you to prove it," he snickered.

"You're a civilian. That's final and conclusive. There isn't one of these certifiable fatheads in uniform that'd have the guts to do what they've all been talking about for fifty years. You touched it off, and

you see victory in your hands right this moment. Bartok is dead."

"No!" he spat. "Where?"

"Coming up here on a lighter. He rashly jumped the ensign who'd arrested us. He got his face blown off."

"So," grunted Voss. "The end of organized resistance to our program. How did he manage, by the way, to blow up our ships with their own ammunition, or whatever really happened?"

"I don't know the details," she replied wearily. "We used glorified lantern-slides to project the simulacrum of a lineship; we could do that with about fifty one-man craft. It's a kind of formation flying. We turned back your shells by magnetic fields. Normally you could dodge them, because you keep ready to move whenever you fire the big guns. But we dubbed in a dummy shell—like the lantern-slide lineship—and you'd see that shell and there wouldn't be a thought in your heads until you were blown up. But you're onto that trick now. It only worked four times, I think. I was a lunatic to think that you could fight guns with brainwork and hope to win."

She collapsed limply into a chair and stared dully at the floor. "Bartok's dead. The communication system's wrecked. You can have your taking-over, Mr. Voss; we're licked."

CHAPTER V

"**H**ELL!" said the Admiral. "Why can't I go out into the street if I want to?"

"Because," said Voss patiently, "you'd be shot down like a dog. You're going to speak from behind cover, and I'll post the best shots in the Navy all over just in case."

"Right," said the Admiral. "Then it's decided. I guess the old brain's clicking right along, eh?" He forced a laugh, and Voss responded with a meager smile.

Tapping on the door. Voss opened it on the young ensign who'd been boasting all over the ship of shooting down the insidious Bartok. He was being avoided by his friends now; he wouldn't let them get a

word in about their own feats of clubbing and mayhem.

"What do you want?" thundered the Admiral. "I'm preparing my address to All Earth and Colonies!"

"Beg pardon, sir," said the ensign. "But I was wondering if I could be assigned to your guard of honor for the address. After all, sir, I did outwit Bartok."

"Since when," asked Voss coldly, "does outwitting consist of getting in a lucky shot?"

"Tut," grumbled the Admiral. "Let him have his way. Why not, Voss?"

"I was going to," said the secretary. "Report this evening."

"Thank you, sir. And—and—"

"Spit it out, kid. What do you want?" demanded Voss.

"About Miss MacNeice, sir. She seemed awfully broken up about what I did. How is she now?"

"Resting easy in Cell Eleven," said the Admiral. "Now go away."

"Thank you, sir," said the ensign, saluting as he closed the door.

"Good boy, that," said Voss. "It pays to have semi-fanatics like him in your train. They'll do the dirty work when nobody else will. Remember that, Fitzjames."

"I will, Voss," said the Admiral. "Now about this speech—"

The ensign was walking down one of the very long corridors of the ship, whistling cheerfully, oblivious to the superstition to the effect that it's the worst kind of luck to a ship; even worse than changing her name.

And in Cell Eleven—neat and comfortable, but a cell—Babe MacNeice was fiddling desperately with the communications control. Trust those bloody incompetents, she dryly thought, to leave a woman unsearched because a matron wasn't handy . . .

Then, by the most convenient of miracles, there was a little tone signal from the switchboard. "It works," she said in a hushed whisper. "It was bound to happen — nobody could try as hard as I've been trying and not get some kind of results."

She hissed into the tiny grid mouthpiece: "Hello—who's in?"

A male voice grumbled: "My God, woman, you've been long enough about it! I'm Casey, heading towards Spica because I can't think of anything else to do. My fuel's low, too."

"Keep going," she said. "When you get there be prepared for anything at all. I'm not making promises, but there's a chance. And my God! What a chance! You get out now. I have some heavy coverage to do."

"Good luck, lady, whoever you are."

She smiled briefly and fiddled with the elaborate, but almost microscopically tiny, controls that directed the courses of the Intelligence Wing.

"Come in, anybody, in the Twenty-Third Cosmic Sector. Anybody at all. This is MacNeice—urgent!"

"Not the famous Babe herself?" came a woman's voice dryly. "I'm listening, dearie."

"You locate on Aldebaran III, sister, in no more than ten hours. Keep under cover. Now get out. Aldebaran III has to be covered."

With an anxious note the voice asked: "Just a minute — how's Barty? I heard a rumor—"

"Forget it, sister," snapped Babe. "You have a job to do." She cut the woman out and called in rapid succession as many of the thirty Cosmic Sectors as she could get. One set had fallen into the hands of the Navy, and that was bad, but she cut out before they could have traced it or even guessed what it was. There had been a confused murmur and a single distinct voice saying: "The damned thing's a radio, sir!" before she cut out.

What she had been doing was to locate operatives on the principal planets and stations of the Cosmos; operatives prepared for anything. It had been a job of routing; they bunched together when they weren't under orders. She had to break them up—and she did.

After locating one stubborn female, she heard a man's tread in the corridor outside and as quickly as she could hid the little panel-like affair, which, considering where she

was forced to hide it, was not a very speedy job of concealment.

THE ENTIRE CITY of New Metropole was jammed into the vast Square of the Living Statues that evening for the ultimate proclamation from Admiral of the Fleet Fitzjames concerning the taking-over and the new order to be established. Though, of course, some historians would say that there was nothing new about it, but that it was a very old order indeed.

There had been erected against the superb backdrop of the living statues a great booth-like affair from which the Admiral would make his speech, a speech to be heard simultaneously by every living human and colonial extraterrestrial alive. There was even declared a temporary amnesty on extraterrestrials; for this evening they might walk the streets—but only to and from the Square.

The booth was, of course, weapon-proof. Voss had been most particular about that.

Crowds had begun to assemble early in the afternoon; if there was to be a new order they would make sure that they would be its earliest and heartiest boosters. By dusk the press of people had grown so great that there was no room to turn around, let alone draw a weapon, so Fitzjames could have no fear on that score. The only free place was the platform of the booth, flush with the great transparent base on which the living statues moved on in their endless perfection.

When night had fallen they turned on the floodlights normally used to illuminate the statues, removing the color-wheels. The crowd was picked out in glaring detail by the pitiless glow. As far as the eye could see there was a meadow of faces upturned, each sharp and distinct by itself. The statues were in the dark, their sole remaining lights being turned on the booth. The very music had been subdued so that the amplifiers would lose no word of what the Admiral would say. It was a memorable occasion in many unsuspected ways.

Ten o'clock sharp enter the Admiral, dropping from the heavens in an ornate lighter which was then immediately dispatched. Fitzjames was afraid that his hour of triumph might end tragically should a spanner fall from the craft and crack his skull.

With him, of course, were Voss and the guard of honor.

Five past ten Voss stepped to the mike. "Friends," he said, "it is my proud duty to present to you the man who has liberated us from the yoke of the All Earth Exec—Fitzjames The First!"

There was an astounded hush from the audience, and then a protesting murmur. The wildest fancy they had indulged in hadn't included anything like a monarchy!

Fitzjames The First stepped to the mike as Voss bowed low. He said: "My loyal subjects, I greet you."

The guard of honor fidgeted. It had been a well-kept secret. The young ensign strolled over to Voss, who was surprised to feel a handgun's muzzle pressed into his ribs.

"Excuse me?" he said strainedly. "Are you sure you're quite sane, young man? Take that thing away."

"I'm not only sane," said the Ensign, "I'm Bartok. When that silly ass fired at me in the lighter he missed, of course. So I switched clothes in three minutes flat, Babe made up my face with the kit that every Intelligence Wing man carries, then we blew the face off the ensign of yours. He was unconscious. A pity."

"—magnificent demonstration of the reversion to childlike faith in the will of providence and the divine right of kings—" the Admiral was droning.

Voss, a slender, slimy, active man, dived into the shadows as Bartok's attention wavered from him to the speaker.

The Wing Commander dived right after him. "Where are you?" he called into the darkness. "Don't be a damned fool!"

The only answer was a slug zip-ping past his ear.

"Bartok," hissed Voss from the

blackness, "this is your last adventure. I can see you and you can't see me. Good-bye, Bartok."

THERE WAS a sickening *crunch* from the blackness and a gasp that sounded like a tin can in labor. "The poor, damned fool," said Bartok. One of the living statues had stepped on the man's head in the course of some intricate *pas seul*. Bartok had known it would happen, for the periodicity of the statues was limited to this: in the course of two minutes and forty seconds every square foot of the dancing platform was trodden on at least once by at least one of the two-ton feet of the statues.

Meanwhile the remainder of the guard of honor was vainly trying to fire unloaded handguns—except one slender young man who simply grinned like a cat.

"Okay, Babe," said Bartok to the slender young man. "You do it."

"With pleasure!"

As the Admiral had just got around to the choosing of his palace-planet—nothing less than an entire planet would do for his regal estates—he too felt a gun in his ribs. He stopped short.

"Read this," said the slender young man, who was trying to keep from giggling.

Without ado of any sort the Admiral placed the paper on the lectern

before him and read in flat, colorless tones:

"I hereby declare that I personally had no such nonsense in mind. It was the work of my secretary. I hereby state that I assume no powers beyond my naval duties.

"General Order to All Officers: any seditious talk of taking over will be severely dealt with by the Intelligence Wing which is—*utp!*—hereby constituted as supreme police authority over the Navy.

"Memorandum to Wing Commanders: you will turn over all insignia of your office to representatives of the Intelligence Wing who will make themselves known to you."

In a very small voice he said: "That is all," and deflated into a chair. There was a titanic roar of applause from the assembled peoples of New Metropole.

"Darling," said Babe, "if the timing doesn't come off right—if those people I contacted don't show up to the Wing Commanders soon enough, before they recover—!"

"They will," said Bartok. He laughed shortly, like the closing of a heavy lock.

"What's funny?"

"They—~~they~~—had the guns and we didn't have a thing but ourselves. Sweet, this is one stunt they'll never try again."

The crowd, still applauding, began to disperse into the night.

MR. PACKER GOES TO HELL!

Novelette

by Cecil Corwin

(Sequel to the hilarious "13 o'Clock")

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JUNE ISSUE OF

STIRRING SCIENCE

STORIES

OUT NOW!

WHEN HALF-WORLDS MEET

by Hugh Raymond

(Author of "Power," "Rebirth of Tomorrow," etc.)



The third planet of the solar system was half Earth and half Mars. And the villain of the piece was the speed of light. One of the strangest stories ever written!

JO-AD DUG his heels into his hump-backed steed's ribs and grunted. "The moon used to be up there," he said morosely, pointing skyward.

"What did it look like?"

He stared at the heavens and, for an instant, his dull eyes glittered.

"Mo-Ad, there was nothing to compare with it in the sky for sheer beauty. A giant globe of the most delicate yellow with black markings over

the surface that took on the semblance of a face. It was utilized mainly for romance. Lovers wooed each other in its glow, in cities and countries alike . . ."

Mo-Ad rested himself in his saddle.

"What were cities and countries?" he asked.

Jo-Ad sighed.

"The cities were great beehives of industry—that was something that meant producing articles in quantities," he added hastily as he saw the instant question form upon his son's lips, "wherein they worked and played, lived and died, loved and begat their children. Beehives of industry, where they made by the millions, in almost less time than it takes to tell, the instruments we produce today by hand. Giant social centers where everyone was happy, where everyone was warm and safe. Countries—well, they were sections of land each inhabited by different races of people. Races, my son, were sections of humanity. Some were different from others. Some had black skin, some yellow, some pale like ours. Some had long noses, some short. A lot of them were tall and a lot were runty. They were not like us." He raised his head and, shading his eyes, peered ahead.

"We are approaching the Cliff. You must know of that as well. And when you see it you will understand why our skins are pale and why the skins of the People of the Top are black. . . ."

Mo-Ad broke in, eager to show his father a glimmer of the analytical intelligence that alone of the People of the Bottom was Jo-Ad's.

"But father, you said that no one could ever reach the country of the People of the Top. The Cliff is too high. How then do you know that their skins are black?"

Jo-Ad pulled his burnoose closer about him to protect his thin skin from the evening chill.

"Their bodies have been found—torn and mangled at the bottom. Some careless individuals fell the awful height of the Cliff. According to the ancient reckoning, it is a hundred and fifty miles high. Their skins were as black as coal. You see, Mo-Ad, when the Top grew over the Bottom, the atmosphere poured down on us, leaving a thin layer on the Top and burdening our Bottom with billions upon billions of tons of air. That is why we are pale skinned. The sun must penetrate additional hundreds of miles of atmosphere. The Top people compensated for the loss of air by developing larger lung-capacities."

"And how do you know all these things?" asked Mo-Ad with the skepticism of the very young.

His father looked at him long.

"I have read the Books," he said in an awful voice. "And I know why the Top grew upon the Bottom and why we are pale-skinned and where the Moon went and why we have no industry or cities or countries. And many things more which you shall know."

Mo-Ad jogged along in silence for awhile. The undulating desert flowed by. Far ahead loomed the Cliff.

"I have heard it said," he breathed softly at length, "that once this land was buried beneath a bottomless ocean."

"You heard aright." Jo-Ad sat up very straight and gazed sadly about the empty wilderness lit by the rays of the setting sun. "The ocean grew when the Top grew and pressed down what it grew over and the Bottom was flooded. The cities were drowned and almost all of the people. The machines rusted and fell apart and their

secrets were lost. Presently, the People of the Top, who had all these things, bored through their planet and began draining away the ocean that buried the Bottom. It flowed into the empty chasms under the Top. In a little while it was all gone. The remnants of the people from whom we are descended came down from the mountains to the dry lands and grew and multiplied—but slowly. In the course of time some water returned—and thus our people lived." He paused and looked at the looming Cliff with hatred. "But enough . . . we are approaching the Cliff."

HIGH SOARED the Cliff, one hundred and fifty miles into the dense air. From where their camels coursed, up and down and over the sand-hills, they could see its curving bulk stretching away to the uttermost limits of the horizon. An insurmountable barrier, it reared its grim, absolutely sheer wall to invisible heights. The top was lost in shifting clouds that poured over the barrier and floated down to condense in watery vapor which buried half its height in impenetrable mists.

"It goes around the world," gasped Jo-Ad, as he was jogged roughly by his camel, "and no one can climb it. It is too high. It is too smooth."

"But the flying birds. Could they not have scaled the Cliff?" asked Mo-Ad naively.

"I have told you, my son, that all those secrets were lost when the Bottom was drowned."

Mo-Ad stopped his camel and slid to the ground. He set his feet firmly in the sandy soil. He looked inquiringly at his father who also dismounted and stood, lost in thought, one hand on the tether of his mount, the other cupping a weary chin.

"Father, where is the Moon?"

Jo-Ad lifted his head and pointed.

"Beyond the Top. During the course of ages, the uneven pull of the Top slowed the satellite in its orbit to a point where it hung stationary in the sky above the Top." He bent down and with the end of his camel-whip drew a diagram in the sand. What looked like two badly fitted halves fitted to each other, one greatly overlapping the other. A smaller full sphere hung beyond the wider half.

"This is what the three planets look like now, Mo-Ad," he said.

Mo-Ad gazed earnestly at the diagram, eager to please his father who had done what no other parent of his race would — imparted precious knowledge to his son.

"And what is the name of the Top, father?"

"Mars, my son."

PROFESSOR CHARTERS Randolph was no snob. He did his plowing himself. The little college town was too poor to support him adequately and pay for the wild experiments his faculty colleagues frowned on. He cracked a whip in the air above the heads of his two blowsy horses and felt the plow-belt about his waist pulled forward sharply.

His action was automatic, because he really wasn't thinking of the plowing at all. The long furrows lengthened out behind him in mathematically straight lines, and occasionally he absently cracked his whip and was pulled forward when he got around to noticing that the plow had stopped. Randolph jerked his head up and mopped it with a violently red handkerchief. He looked around with a

startled gaze and realized that he and his horses had reached the end of the field. Wearily he started to turn them around. Half-heartedly, he hitched up the belt encircling his waist, then, suddenly let it drop, stepped up to the horses, disconnected their reins and with a slap on the rump sent them ambling toward the barn. He took himself painfully toward the distant cottage settling like a grey brick on the brown hill-side.

His wife Martha greeted him in the front yard which crouched close to the country road. She waved a hand at him and wiped the sweat off her own brow with the other. Hard toil had changed Martha Randolph from the city stenographer who had fallen in love with the Professor into a tall, hard woman of the soil who broke her back during the day with farm chores and spent the evenings reading Shakespeare and holding fuming test tubes for her busband.

"Martha, I'm sick of it," he said with a droop in the corners of his mouth. He passed her and went on up to the porch where he doused his sweating head in a pail of cold water and dipped a painful of it into his mouth.

She came up behind him and, laying her cheek against his shoulder, bugged him fiercely.

"Go on in the house and lay down," she suggested.

He turned to her and stood arms akimbo.

"No, I'm going into the lab. When's supper? Is Charley coming over?"

She bent over the pail of fresh water and took a long drink before replying. When she straightened, she flashed her white teeth in the light of the sun.

"Charley'll be over after supper. We're having steak. Want any beer? I can drive into town."

"Never mind, darling," he replied, "steak's enough. Thanks."

He turned abruptly and walked around the house to a small shed with a heavy door which he unlocked with a big old-fashioned key. The interior was dark. He carefully lit a kerosene lamp and sent some of the gloom skittering.

Well, he thought, I'm in my castle now. The farm and the back-breaking labor lay far behind. This was his citadel—his citadel of science, as he called it, a safe haven against a disintegrating world. He pulled up a chair, sat down and looked around, gloating.

The interior of the shack was rough pine, unpainted, but clean. Lined with shelves, it measured about fifteen by twenty feet and was connected with the rest of the house with a very small door at one end. The shelves were piled high with colored bottles of chemicals and under them, at intervals along the walls, big machines were set on concrete slabs sunk into the earth. Big metal working machinery, bought and paid for with sweat and blood and tears; machinery begrudged Randolph by a jealous world that took far more than it gave. He shrugged his shoulders in the half darkness and smiled a crooked smile. He'd given it more than it could have given him. Invention after invention to brighten the world and clean up the dirty corners. It had all been stolen, by crooked business men and greedy schools. The Professor was a singular man in his conduct toward the world. He was invariably honest and direct. So his brain work was stolen and he starved more often than he ate.

Between the machines, which were fed by heavy power cables leading out to the field where power lines leaned crazily in all directions on

their way up the mountain to the town, were piles of metal slabs, wires, tools, insulation and more chemicals in cans. Where the shadows lay, thrown by the feeble light of the kerosene lamp, they loomed dirty and like a shambles. He didn't care. The roughness of the assemblage of machinery pleased him. It owed nothing to the outside world. But it was his baby.

THE SAT IN the darkness for a while and then Martha called him in to supper. They ate slowly and meditatively and looked at each other with deep love in their eyes, and sopped huge chunks of bread into the gravy and ate them. As they were having coffee, the unlocked front door opened and Charley Small came in.

"Evenin' folks," he said slowly and took off his cap and sat down.

He was a big, lumbering farmer, who had a brain with a razor's edge and nobody but the Professor to give it something to cut into. He worked during the day at an iceplant in the town and spent as many of his evenings as he could sitting with Randolph in his shack helping him fashion strange machines. He had a queer love for the shiny contraptions turned out by his friend. Somehow, they signified the outside world to him with all its splendor and glory. He was a poet, but only the Professor and his wife knew it.

Martha smiled up at him and pushed a chair against the supper table.

"Have some coffee," she said.

Charley sat down and took a newspaper out of the back pocket of his work overalls and handed it without a word to the Professor. Randolph picked it up, glanced briefly at the headline and threw it into a corner

where reposed stacks of old papers. They often came in handy for kindling fires in the big brick stove.

"What's new?" asked Randolph as Martha got up and reached for the big coffee pot.

Small scratched his thick-thatched head and grunted.

"Nothin' much, Randolph."

"Get that tobacco?"

The big man hitched his pants and brought out a huge package of cut plug. Randolph reached for it.

"Thanks; don't know what I'd have done without it."

He pushed back his plate and leaned aside while Martha stood over them pouring coffee. When she'd finished, she walked over to a shabby studio couch, reclined on it and snapped on a small radio. Presently the strains of a symphony filled the confines of the small house.

They finished their coffee in silence.

"Say, Doc," began Small after a few minutes, "I got a question." From a vest pocket underneath the overalls he produced two small mirrors, of the variety sold on notion counters in five-and-dime stores, and held them up to the dim light.

"What are those?" asked Randolph, interested. He filled his pipe and puffed, looking at the two baubles suspended in the air before his eyes.

"Just an idea I got today. I was sittin' in Sloan's lunch. Sloan has two mirrors on opposite walls and I was sittin' between 'em. I got a look at myself *down* both mirrors—and there I was about a million times on both sides . . ."

The Professor chuckled.

"Rather startling when you see it for the first time."

The big man scratched his head again.

"Yeah. Sorta curious. There I

was curving away on both sides. Say, why don't those images line up?"

Randolph chuckled again.

"They can't. No two mirrors can be brought exactly into line with each other. In the first place, no two planes are ever exactly parallel and that's what you'd need to start off with. Even the slightest unbalance is enough to start the images curving away. And they always do."

The two small mirrors still hovered in the air.

"Yeah, but suppose you could get two of them things in exact line with each other. What would happen?"

Randolph looked at him queerly and thought to himself for a minute. Well, what *would* happen? It had never happened before, so he supposed some result was bound to occur. For some reason, an irrelevant picture of an explosion filled his mind, then faded. It had been a random thought, nothing more. He balanced his pipe in his hands.

"I don't know just what would happen. It's a phenomenon that has never been observed." He reached over and plucked the two mirrors from the big man's calloused hands.

"Yes," he mused, "I wonder what would happen . . ."

"For instance," interrupted Small, "if you could do it and I got between 'em, what would happen to the reflection? Would it stay there after I got out of the way?"

Randolph looked at the mirrors and held them up.

"No, I don't think it would. The reflection is light and light has mass. Astro-physicists have proven that light loses velocity every time it is reflected. Somewhere the reflection would stop and become mass. Natural law governs *that*."

"Well," persisted Small, "what would happen to it after it turned

solid? Could you put your hand on it?"

The Professor looked up with a jerk. He turned wide open eyes on Small.

"I—I suppose you could. Every time the light was re-reflected from mirror to mirror it would lose some of its velocity and get nearer the solid state."

The other drank his coffee and lit a pipe himself.

"Suppose," he continued along his line of reasoning, "suppose you got a bit of sunlight in between 'em. What would you have after it stopped?"

Randolph sat up and stared.

"My god!" he ejaculated, "And they say that yokels can't think! Charley, you've got an idea there. But—it's impossible! Nobody could ever get two mirrors in exact alignment. If they did . . . but damn it, nobody can."

Small stared moodily into the gloom.

"Well," he said, licking his lips. "It was a good idea."

THEY PLAYED cards for awhile and then went into the laboratory where the two of them worked over some machines shaping odd lengths of metal and wood. Finally Small went home.

In bed that night, the big man's idea haunted Randolph's dreams. He awoke at last from a deep sleep, sweating. He'd been dreaming about mirrors. He'd been caught between two of them in exact alignment and hurled, spinning, into infinity.

"God!" he ejaculated and ran his fingers through his hair.

His wife stirred and woke up.

"What's the matter, dear?" she asked, shifting around to face him.

He was still running his fingers through his hair.

"Martha," he said after a time, "It's coming again. An idea. Do you think we can go on short rations for awhile?"

She smiled sleepily and kissed him, used to his sudden notions.

"Of course, darling. I didn't marry a plow horse. I married a man. Be one. Is it more machines, this time?"

He nodded. "Yes," he said hoarsely. She kissed him again.

He went down to his shack many evenings now and worked among the spinning machines powered by the little dynamo that hummed endlessly away, driven by the underground river his science had found. Charley Small helped him shape the box he built and the queer mirrors he carefully polished and ground, and stood over him with infinite patience holding the necessary tools like a nurse at an operating table. Gradually the machine he was building took shape.

Martha came down one evening from the upstairs bedroom whence she had retired after supper for a wink of sleep. It was a dark, warm night and both men were working in their pants and undershirts. Their bare feet made pattering noises on the pine floor as they moved and the room was lit up by the weird glow of a small metal-cutting torch wielded by her husband.

As she entered the room, the Professor swung back the visor which protected his eyes from the flame and stood up painfully. He arched his back. She came over and rubbed it for awhile. Charley looked on, one hand on the controls of the torch, the other tamping the ashes in his pipe. His huge eyes glittered with the light of discovery.

"Anywhere near finished?" she asked.

Randolph wiped his hands with some cotton waste and lit his pipe.

"We've got something, and I don't know what we've got. Remember that centrifuge I built for the Polyclinic that made a dozen separate motions simultaneously? Well, this is a hundred times more complicated."

She straightened her gingham dress and tucked away a wisp of hair behind her ear.

"What's that?" she asked, touching a smoothly rounded bump at one end of the metal box lying on the floor. Looking over it she noticed another at the opposite end.

Her husband grunted.

"That's the nub of the whole thing. It equalizes about a million different factors all at the same time: plane distortion, temperature warp, atmospheric density inside the box, impact of cosmic rays, vibrations from one end of the spectrum to the other and ordinary earth movements. In some ways, though, it isn't as important as this prism." He paused and touched an arrangement of polished glass directly in the center of the top of the steel box. "This reflects light down into the box to another prism which directs the beam toward one of the mirrors mounted on the inside of those bulges."

She considered this for awhile.

"Didn't you tell me that the interior prism was the last stumbling block? You had to get it out of the way without destroying the reflection."

He puffed on his pipe. His eyes lit up with deep satisfaction.

"That's easy—now." He walked to a cabinet and brought out a violin. Caressingly, he ran his fingers down the polished surface.

"At the precise instant when the beam flashes down through the prisms and into the mirrors, I play

a certain note on this violin and the interior prism shatters. The note is attuned to its structure and to none other. A neat bit of reasoning. I wonder if it will work."

She smiled, patted him on his shoulder and left.

FOR A WHILE he stood silent, then lifted the instrument, placed its chin-rest against his throat and played. Charley remained motionless, squatting near the floor, bathed, like a devil out of hell, in the glow of the torch still spitting noisily on a metal grid.

Randolph put down the violin abruptly.

"Let's see if it works," he said softly.

They played with it for a while until their supply of prisms ran out and then opened the box. On the dark metal floor, between the poised mirrors, lay several microscopic lumps of matter that had not been there when they locked the top earlier in the evening.

Randolph shut off the flashlight that had been shining into the primary prism and rolled it into a tool box. He moved to a wooden bench and sat down. Nervously he relit his pipe which had gone out and set his face firmly between his hands, elbows planted on the top of the table before him.

"Charley," he called softly, inclining his head.

The big man shuffled over and leaned heavily on the table, the muscles on his brawny arms standing out like linked walnuts.

"Yeah, it worked. What are you going to do now?"

The Professor looked up at him.

"Charley, I'm going to materialize a sun beam."

The other stared at him for a mo-

ment, uncomprehending. Then, the untutored brain, keen, penetrating, direct, suddenly understood. But Small, although a grown man, was still emotionally a child. He ran out, holding his head in his hands.

The next morning Randolph had the thing out in the big pasture. It was a strange sight, the bronzed body bent slightly over the huge box supported on an old table, his arms holding lightly the body and bow of a violin. He opened the shutter of the prism, aimed it at the sun and drew the bow across the strings of the instrument. There was a tearing noise and a faint tinkle and suddenly it was all over.

Randolph quickly unscrewed the top of the box and looked within. Suspended in the center, directly between the two mirrors, an infinitely tiny, bisected ball of pure light spun and hummed. He'd gotten more than his sunbeam. He'd gotten a tiny half sun.

As he watched, the tiny dot began to grow. In half an hour it was double its original size and getting bigger every minute.

Randolph, paralyzed, stared at the growing dot with undisguised terror. He realized, with awful clarity, that he had stumbled upon something entirely new, and that a whole set of laws governing its action and reaction was coming into being. He fled to the house, frantically grabbed pencil and paper and busied himself for an hour with calculations.

Martha came home from town as he rushed out wildly waving a sheaf of papers. He was shouting incomprehensibly, something about the dot growing until it burned the earth to a cinder. She calmed him down as only she knew how and presently he poured out the whole story.

"But if it increases in size only in

light, why not bury the thing? It can't grow if it can't feed." Her voice was calm, reassuring.

"The thing will grow on any sort of impact vibration whatsoever. These figures prove it. What about cosmic rays? They penetrate many feet of lead. We'd go bankrupt buying a box big enough to hold it."

She shook her head.

"You told me once that a certain amount of ground depth was the equivalent of the quantity of lead necessary to stop the rays. Why don't you throw it down the crack in the rock on the other side of the pasture?"

He looked at her wildly.

"Darling, of course!" he shouted and danced a jig.

She stood for this a while, then drew him away to the box. Peering over the edge, she glimpsed the evilly glowing whirling dot and shuddered.

"The box is too heavy," she cried, "And that crevice is over half a mile away."

He considered a moment, then brought his fist down on the edge of the table on which the machine rested.

"Martha, empty the fish-bowl and bring it back here, quick. Just the fish, not the water!"

She left at high speed and returned in a few minutes. Seizing the huge object, he turned it over, and with a hiss the ball of fire fell into the large bowl of water. Without wasting an instant he cupped a hand over one end and dashed madly for the other end of the field.

He returned in about an hour to find his wife screwing on the top of the box.

"Is it safe?" she asked anxiously, wiping a smear of grease from her hands.

He looked at her with a relieved expression on his face.

"Safe. Buried a thousand feet down."

They walked arm in arm toward the house.

FOR A WHILE the box was forgotten, but little by little the desire to explore its possibilities grew back in Randolph's mind. He spent long hours of the evenings poring over calculations, working out its mathematics. Finally he decided to have a go at it again. This time there would be no danger, he promised himself.

He went to see Saunders, the president of the town's small bank.

Saunders was sitting at his desk as he walked in. He blinked his small piggy eyes rapidly and fiddled with the gold watch chain strung from the pockets of his vest.

"Afternoon, Professor," he said evenly in his clipped mid-western accent. "They told me you'd phoned about a loan."

Randolph sat down.

"Yes. I'm conducting some new experiments . . ."

Saunders smiled primly and looked over the top of his pince nez.

"Yes, yes. Of course. I know of your work. Some very valuable things you turned out for the clinic. Pity you didn't patent them."

As the bank president had been one of the cabal who had swindled him out of the proceeds of his clinical researches, Randolph tried to let this pass with as much aplomb as was possible considering the circumstances.

"I want fifty thousand dollars," he said flatly, without further pause.

Saunders blinked his eyes twice when he heard this. The pince nez came off and fell with a clank into his lap.

"Wha—wha—what's that? Fifty thousand dollars?"

The Professor nodded grimly.

Saunders raised his hands in horror.

"What could you do with so much money?" he asked in a strained falsetto.

"I said that I was conducting some new experiments," replied Randolph firmly.

"Of what nature?"

"I cannot explain that until I've some concrete results to offer. But I need enough money to buy immense quantities of lead. Once that is accomplished I feel that anyone financially connected with the experiment would be in on a goldmine."

"You mean that literally?"

The Professor's face lost its serious mien.

"Yes, I do," he said, smiling. "A goldmine. Quite literally."

Saunders opened his eyes as wide as they could go and pressed a stud on his desk. Within a minute his secretary walked in. The bank president looked up at her with an amused smile playing about his thin lips.

"Please show the Professor out," he snapped, losing his smile almost immediately, "I'm afraid he's slightly touched."

Randolph stared at him for a moment, then began to laugh. He waved the astonished secretary aside and walked out.

THERE WERE no experiments for a time after that, and the box lay untouched in a corner of the shack because it represented a trillion tons of unexploded trinitrotoluene. He looked at it during the long autumn evenings, and sometimes his wife came in and stood by his side and regarded the box anxiously. The

bolted top imprisoned a devil and her supple hands caressed away at such times his desire to let it loose.

But it could not remain the same always. His machines were silent, and Charley came over oftener now and helped him stare at the bulky object. Finally flesh and blood collapsed. Caution flew out of the window.

He bought a telescope and rigged it up to focus on small objects such as clay pigeons and dolls bought in the five-and-dime store in the nearby town and he found that when his prisms shattered, a small, almost microscopic, replica lay amid their powdered ruins. Complex physical laws governed the various reactions. All the replicas grew slowly, in proportion to the amount of light used in reflecting them, but faster when more vibrations were allowed to drench them. In some unknown fashion the scanning telescope became almost a living thing, automatically adjusting the rate of expansion in accordance with the light used and the size of the original object. Thus, when one day he trained the refractor on the top of a nearby mountain, the resulting bisected image grew much more rapidly than usual until it threatened to bulge the sides of the reproducing machine. With infinite labor he carted the expanding mass with the generous help of Charley Small to the crevice and buried it safely. Small objects when reproduced reacted differently. Their rate of growth was slower. And there seemed to be a limit. The magical power of the simple telescope astounded him. Sitting at his calculations he concluded that he had stumbled across natural laws unknown previously, operating logically with rigid mathematical precision.

Many strange reproductions followed the first few simple things. The side of a horse, a frothy section of cloud that inundated the shack and only ceased growing when the ground had absorbed it completely, a clock with hands but only a solid mass where the works should have been. The matter composing the objects seemed totally different from any earthly composition. It seemed a sort of rubbery soil that varied in composition, texture and strength; it duplicated the matter of the object, but only in a thin shell.

Presently the crevice filled up. He spent days blasting out another.

THE CROWNING experiment was undertaken on a snowy winter's night in January of the following year. Ensconced on a tall chair beside the box, which was mounted on its table in the pasture, and attended by the faithful Small, he opened the shutter of the device after focussing the telescope apparatus on Venus and then calmly drew the bow of his violin across the taut strings.

Venus lay within the reproducer, a small, solid half sphere that grew as they watched it in the pale starlight. Randolph risked for a few moments the faint light of a flashlight shining on the planet. It lay fuming quietly on the bottom, a circular disc, growing, heaving, outlines of mountains and continents appearing. Finally they smashed it to powder with a pickaxe and dumped it down the new hole in the rock.

With money saved from lowered food expenditures and articles written at a constant stream for well-known scientific journals which snapped them up because he was a genius and they knew it, he built

large but flimsy lead boxes which held the halved reproductions of many commonplace objects and some which he never permitted Martha to see. He kept them for a while, made voluminous notes, then disposed of them in the usual way.

When Spring came he understood the process thoroughly.

"Stated simply," he said to Charley as they leaned against a fence watching a nearby stream liberate itself from the winter ice, "it's like this: The light is reflected between the two mirrors and, losing velocity, becomes mass, retaining its inertia. Just pure mass—*matter*, peculiar matter. And it grows. Slower or faster in proportion to the size of the object reproduced. It feeds on vibration because—well, because it's matter that's been born suddenly and knows it's alive. Not really alive, Charley, more like a stretched rubber band that is released and flies past its limit of elasticity. It's based on a physics that seems to operate *through* the fourth dimension and *into* our space. I say the fourth dimension because I don't know where it comes from and that's as handy an explanation as any."

Small scratched his head.

"Can it make money?" he asked naively.

Randolph laughed.

"I told Saunders it could. Yes, with that machine I could reproduce enough gold, by simply focussing the telescope on a treasury Eagle, to buy the continent. And that's precisely why I won't. We'd inevitably overproduce and ruin the market and probably the whole economic system.

"I'm just a damn fool, Charley," he continued, "I've got a God in a box and I can't even ask him for a bent penny."

IN A BRILLIANTLY sun-lit day in July, a lead box containing an image of the planet Mars cracked from the pressure of the growing half-sphere within and began to expand over the floor of the shack. It grew unhindered because the Professor and his wife were in town buying household goods and nobody was there to stop it.

Charley saw it as he approached the shack on Sunday. He saw the cottage suddenly pushed up in the air from beneath and suddenly a great hollow half-globe of rusty-red with many strange markings and convolutions on its surface began to spread out and grow larger and bulkier on the flat Illinois farm.

By morning it had covered the town and the residents of the whole county were fleeing. Randolph and his wife drove the car until there was no gasoline left in the tanks, then stole some and continued to flee toward the west.

In a month the state was overwhelmed, and the next three months saw the enormous mass of expanding matter pushing out over the Atlantic. Beneath it, from California to New York and from Maine to Mexico, the American continent lay crushed, pulverized. The expanding juggernaut had obliterated the highest development of a culture fifty centuries old.

RANDOLPH and his wife managed to reach the coast and take passage on a steamer that sailed south until it reached a tiny collection of islands near the center of the Pacific. There it landed. And the Professor began to write a diary in which he analyzed the Martian destroyer.

"The ocean level is rising," he wrote, "and soon even these high islands will be inundated. The enormous mass of Mars has filled up the ocean beds and will continue to grow until it reaches its theoretical limit of expansion. That limit is almost precisely half way around the Earth. From where I sit I can see the approaching wall—it must be fifty miles high—which signals the final destruction of life on this part of the globe. The Moon, sun and stars are no longer visible because of the weather. I do not think any life surviving in these latitudes will ever see the Moon again. The added weight on one half of the planet will exert a tremendous pull and slowly bring it to a standstill, much closer to the Mars half of earth. The people up there—millions must have 'climbed aboard'—will be lighter because the Moon's pull will offset the combined gravitation of Earth and its Martian cap. The people down here will not be lighter or heavier—for they will be dead. I have murdered more than half a world. Maybe I'm the Devil. Maybe I'm just Science gone haywire."

And on another page.

"Today is the last day. I've rigged up a steel container and I'll put these papers in it and throw it into the dead volcano. I don't know why. They're Science and death. It can be of no use to any future civilization. But somehow I feel that it must go on. I feel no regrets. Mainly because the world was destroyed not by its evil but by its best. The end is clean. The end is Science."

MO-AD STEPPED back from the diagram and thoughtfully

erased it with his foot. He glanced timidly at the Top and regarded for a long moment its lacy crown of swirling vapor.

"Is there no way to mount the barrier?" he asked, finally.

His father's face was grim.

"There is no need for us now to conquer the Cliff, Mo-Ad. Shortly we shall return to our home in the South and I shall create from the Books—with your help, my dear son—a machine that will rescue our people from this dry half-world of hunger and death. Come."

For many days and nights, the two traveled toward their home and came at last to the small village of tents that was the mightiest metropolis of the Bottom. They were welcomed joyously by the small population and feasted for several days.

At the end of a week, Jo-Ad drew Mo-Ad away from his studies and showed him several old notebooks. On the cover of one, old, threadbare, worm-eaten, was written in rust-brown ink the words, "Diary of Charters Randolph." Two others, in the same condition of decay and decrepitude, were printed books. There were also several tightly-rolled parchment scrolls of a peculiar blue sheen with white lines upon them.

Mo-Ad read the Diary through. It was written in an ancient form of his tongue, but the surpassing intelligence inherited from his father, the sole intellectual genius of the Bottom, stood him in good stead. When he was thoroughly acquainted with the story, Jo-Ad began work.

Out of the poor materials dug from the earth by the tribe, he fashioned with infinite labor a small mirror-lined box surmounted with an intricate prism arrangement of smaller mirrors which were polished with

great pains by Mo-Ad. Presently the apparatus, at the end of six months, stood complete in the sandy open circle surrounded by the city of tents.

In the deep blackness of one starry night, Jo-Ad gathered the members of his tribe together and explained that they were to go forth in the morning upon a great adventure. He bade them pack their goods upon all the available camels. Then, with Mo-Ad, he went to the Box.

For a while he did nothing but stand silently in the darkness staring at the sky. Mo-Ad, by his side, grew restless.

"Look, my son," cried Jo-Ad suddenly, pointing to a dim red star slowly rising from the horizon. "That is the planet Mars. It was the old God of War. He was a powerful God, but ever stronger was Jupiter, the mightiest of them all. Observe, Mo-Ad, the great blue planet far above. That is the planet Jupiter. And tomorrow, the King of the Gods will resume his sway."

He drew from beneath his garments a simple one-stringed musical instrument, stepped to the small, crude telescope connected to the prisms and sighted along its length, bringing the barrel into line with the blue planet. With a free hand he opened the shutter. Then, raising his instrument he poised himself in the cold desert air and drew a short bow across the single string.

"Now," he breathed. And as the squeaky note died away, a faint tinkle sounded on the air.

Jo-Ad dropped the crude violin and with his son's aid unscrewed the top of the Box. He peered into its depths once, and heaved a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"We shall wait, Mo-Ad, for the rising of the sun," he said.

THE COSMIAN LEAGUE



WITH THIS ISSUE we think that the Cosmian League is beginning to get the feel of itself; the flow of forces through its new-born veins is beginning to create stirrings, and the League is looking around slowly, thinking as one.

We have undergone considerable thought as to the whys and wherefors of our existence; we have explained to ourselves the state of science and the world; we have stated our position, the stand we prefer to take, our attitude on things. Now we must ponder just what reaction our Cosmians will take to all this. What next?

If, indeed, the world is on the very brink of an age of atomic power, of interplanetary flight, of tremendous developments; if these things are actually now merely a matter of a decade or less, what shall we do today in science-fiction to take advantage of that? We have stated simply our code: we believe in science and human progress. That should be sufficient to work on. Clearly, we all mean the same thing by science—we mean the accumulation of human knowledge, the acquisition of the technical means of mastering the natural forces about us and of bending the world about us to human will. It is doubtful if our ideas of human progress are all the same, but the Cosmian League is not going to pursue that definition any further. Humanity has not yet clearly defined its attitude on progress in unemotional terms. But it is probable that we will all agree that believing in science and human prog-

ress together does definitely bring us all in the same general stream.

The Cosmian League is not an organization to remake the world; it is a science-fiction club. We must seek a way to make ourselves heard among the readers of science-fiction and impress upon them our conviction that the world we read about is an actual one awaiting its birth soon. There are many who cast doubt upon science, basing their doubts upon the bombs, the tanks, the machines that replace men. But humanity cannot go backwards for that way lies the animal and unending toil and eventually death. To go forwards we must have the machine and science, therefore we must not give way to the misusers of science. We must affirm our faith everywhere that science itself is not to blame, that progress will overcome the flaws of today and bring about that world of tremendous events we read about. The universe is ours, but only if we resolutely support science and the progress for the world to be derived from its humane application.

The Cosmian League is working out a program for its followers interested in joining clubs and meeting and discussing with others. Meanwhile the immediate necessity is for our membership to continue its strong growth. If you have not yet joined, write to The Cosmian League, % Cosmic Stories, 19 East 48th St., New York, N. Y., stating that you are in agreement with its principles (which are support of science and human progress). Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your membership card.

INTERFERENCE

by Walter C. Davies

(Author of "Forgotten Tongue," "New Directions," etc.)



Alone in the emptiness of space, the two psychologists suffered the mental static of a whole planet, and no matter where they went the interference followed.

"TAKE IT EASY, now," warned the President of the United States. "A lot depends on you—don't go off half-cocked. You only get one chance. That's all we can afford."

Boyle took the extended hand and shook it heartily. "We'll certainly do our best, sir," he said. And from the tone of his voice you could tell that he meant it.

The vast field was crowded; beneath the hot summer sun sweated twenty thousand people, surging, cheering, breaking through cordons of police lined up for their own protection. Dips were doing a thriving business; more than one light-fingered gentleman was planning to retire on the rich pickings from the crowd. People were far too excited to consider whether or not it was their own hands in their pockets or that of some total stranger of predatory instincts. The crowd was in a holiday mood, exalted to be in the same rocket field with Boyle and Cantrell.

The two objects of adoration were bearing up well under the strain, humble psychologists though they had been up to a few weeks ago. After shaking the President's hand and being clapped on their backs by enough distinguished foreigners to fill an embassy the size of the great pyramid, they were blushing a little and very happy at their good fortune.

"But," whispered Boyle from the corner of his mouth, "if we don't come back they'll know we died trying." Suddenly grim, he surveyed the vast sea of faces stretching before him. An emcee took him by the arm and led him to a mike through which he would address the crowd.

"Hello—" he began, and then broke off, startled by the sound of his own voice roaring out across the field. "Hello, all you people. My partner and I just want to thank you before we leave in the *Andros*. If we don't return send out more men, men better than Cantrell and I. Because we aren't coming back before we crack the problem that's assigned to us. When—if—you see the jets of the old *Andros* in the sky again, maybe in a week, maybe in a year, you'll know that the answer is in our hands

and that the plague, the spastitis, is over. Or as good as over."

The roar that went up from the crowd was deafening as he modestly stepped back from the mike. The emcee was yelling things into it, but the tremendous ovation drowned out even the tornado of sound that the loudspeakers created.

Boyle waved at the crowd again. "All ready?" he snapped at Cantrell, his partner in the enterprise. "Everything checked?"

"Betcha life," said Cantrell. "Get in." Like an insect disappearing in the knothole of a giant tree trunk, Boyle eased through the tiny port in the grey, slab-sided hull of the *Andros*. Cantrell vaulted in immediately after him, and the huge plug of metal that sealed the ship swung into place from the inside.

The crowd had quieted, and the announcators roared warnings to stand back from the breath of the fiery Titan that soon would roar its own message. Police cleared the mob away from the firing area with squad cars driving masses of people before them. Hastily the reviewing stand was rolled away from the ship.

The President got into his car, a long, low open Jefferson 22. He looked a little ill. "I hope they make it," he said, with a visible effort. "They're plucky young—" Then he could no longer contain himself. He began to cough violently, his hands trembling toward his mouth.

Doctors clustered around as he collapsed. Even in unconsciousness his body twitched grotesquely and his finely modeled hands trembled as if with cold. "He's got it," said one surgeon grimly. "The President has spastitis. It's spreading faster than we thought. And there go the dream-boys who have to get out into space to find a cure." He gestured at the

Andros, which was ponderously aiming itself at the zenith with its own self-elevators.

With a mind-staggering crash the ship took off. The wind of its departure almost tore clothes from the surgeons at the Presidential car. Long after it had vanished—seemingly dead into the sun—their ears rang with the concussion, and breezes stiffly whipped along the field.

CANTRELL grinned feebly from the bunk. "I'm all right," he said weakly. "I can get up. This damned space-sickness gets me every time. You ready to try out the polypHONE?"

The hardy Boyle grinned back through a tangle of electronics supplies. "It's all rigged up and ready for you. Catch." He tossed over a set of headphones connected with the machinery and donned a similar set of his own. "Relax," he warned. "If we're not far enough out this ought to be a full-blooded shock to mind and body." He switched on a dull-glowing tube.

Cantrell squinted his eyes shut and concentrated on the familiar thought patterns of his partner. He caught them for a moment. Boyle was thinking of the blackness of space through which they were speeding and wondering vaguely whether the meteor interceptor would work as well under stress as it had in the tests. He held up a hand with thumb and forefinger meeting, both crooked, in the time-honored technicians' gesture of: coming over 100%.

Then there was a sudden rip in the smoothly unreeling pattern. It was as though a panorama were being opened before his eyes; the panorama of his partner's mind. Then a seam opened suddenly and without warning. He was reading the minds of

total strangers, people he'd never heard of.

In rapid sequence he caught the image of a grubby little room as seen by a short man, and then surges of physical disgust at the sight—through this short stranger's eyes—of a big, muscular woman. Following that image and impression was a vision of staring dead into the sun, some fool who was looking for their ship, no doubt. Back to the grubby room, but this time seen from the slightly higher elevation of the muscular woman, who obviously didn't like the little man she focused on any more than he liked her.

For a full hour Cantrell tried to claw his way back to the mind stream of the man who was raptly sitting a few feet from him, but the obtrusive thoughts of people back on earth insisted on popping up. For a full hour Cantrell plumbed the depths of degradation in some minds, read the noble and exalted thoughts of others. He tuned in on one murder and two suicides, seen in dizzy angles by the different participants in the violence done.

Through them all was a continual undertone of abominable worry and expectancy of death. Cantrell grunted softly whenever that image emerged. He recognized it easily; that was what he and Boyle were out there in space to fight. It was the ever-present dread of being struck down by the plague raging on Earth—the shakes, spastitis malignans, whatever you wanted to call it.

Cantrell saw people drop in the street, only to begin to tremble horribly at the hands and feet with the disease. Finally he tore the headset off in disgust. Boyle looked at him mildly.

"You try it solo," said Cantrell. "I can't get a damned thing out of the

ether except the pressure-waves from Tellus. And they aren't pretty."

Boyle removed his own set carefully. "It's eavesdropping," he said. "I tried to get you every second. What were you doing?"

"Just what you were," grunted his partner. "Just exactly. I was trying to get you, but you weren't to be had. We have to move on, Boyle. Do what you can with the accelerators."

Boyle went to the instrument panel, worked the multiplex of levers. Too near the Earth! Too near to the suffering stew of human beings in agony, never knowing who would be next with the shakes. That was what they had to get away from—the emotional jags and lunatic vibrations from the home planet.

He and Cantrell had been carefully teamed as psychological mates for the full utilization of the polyphone. Essentially the machine was intended to heighten to the nth degree the rapport of a pair like this one. But they were too sensitive for the machine. There was interference from the thousands who passed in the street, from everybody all over the globe who was thinking consecutively at the time.

And because the shakes was a disease of psychological degeneration you had to fight it by probing into a mind and finding what was wrong. It didn't have to be a diseased mind, for every normal mind has in its depths the seeds of every psychological affliction that breaks out in wilder form. In Boyle's well-ordered brain were minute traces of megalomania, satyriasis, schizophrenia, all the words ending in philia and phobia as well as other unpleasant matters. Everybody has them, whether he knows it or not.

The idea had been to shoot these

two out into space, far from the influence and interference of Earth; then they would work deeper and deeper into each other's minds, finally to discover the seeds of the shakes that were inevitably lying dormant.

One of the pleasant features of psychiatry is that once you have your problem broken down it is already solved. The synthetic element of logic is superfluous; analysis is sufficient. It might be that the shakes consisted of a fear of technical progress reaching epidemic proportions through hysterical contagion. You see a man fall in the street feebly kicking his heels in protest at being deprived of the liberty to roam on grassy fields and your own elements of protest are somewhat stirred. Then one day you feel despondent and they explode when your censor band is not on guard against subversive urges like that. And for the rest of your life you are a spastic, kicking and squirming uncontrollably. Or until someone calmly explains to you what is wrong—about the machine age and the rest. Then you are miraculously cured. And one cure breeds a thousand as confidence grows.

Meanwhile there was the matter of interference from Earth. Boyle pushed the fuel rod down to the limits of the outward bound trip. Dammit, they'd have to get away from the static, he brooded.

“WHAT'S OUR POSITION?” queried Boyle. He was relaxing, Cantrell at the driving panel.

"Practically ideal," said his partner. "I haven't checked, but we should be well out of the range of anything from Earth. Going high and fancy, we are—per second acceleration for two weeks. That's plenty far. Do you want to try out the polyphone again?"

"Blow off the dust," grunted Boyle, swinging himself from the bunk. Gravity on the ship was at Earth level; that had meant tons of extra equipment and power consumption far above normal, but these two on whom the fate of their planet depended could not be distracted by space sickness and flying soup.

Cantrell readied the polyphone, testing and checking the scores of minute connections and solders that held the complex creation together. Some he tightened, others he ripped out and replaced. At length the psychologist reported: "All ready. Let's make this tryout a good one."

"Right. You stay open and receptive; I'll drive as deep into your mind as I can. And Cantrell—I know it's not a nice thing to ask, but you'll have to have complete confidence in me. I don't want you to seal off any sections at all from me. I want you to stay as open as though you weren't being probed. You're a specialist; you could close off whatever you wanted to. But we don't know where the spastitis seeds lie. It may be in some group-unconscious engram or some especially unsavory crime you've committed and forced yourself to forget. I'll play square with you, Cantrell. For the sake of the whole planet back there—don't keep any secret places."

His partner stared at him curiously. "Okay," he said at last. "You know best. But if you find anything especially nasty, do me the favor of not telling me about it."

"Agreed," said Boyle with relief. He switched on the machine as they donned the head sets. The great tube glowed.

Cantrell relaxed in body and mind as he felt the probing fingers sent from his partner's brain pluck away at his grey matter. It wasn't an un-

pleasant sensation, rather like a mental Swedish massage. Vaguely, images came through. He stiffened a little. There shouldn't be any images here, and if there were he shouldn't get them. For the moment putting aside the receptive mood, he reached out, shutting his eyes and wrinkling his brow in an effort to encompass the foreign thought vibrations that were filtering into his skull.

He saw a sky then through the eyes of some person on whose mind he had landed. The sky was curiously dusky. And with the vision of the sky was a poignant sense of longing that filled the mind of Cantrell's host. The words of it seemed to be: "My loved one! My loved one—on *their* side. Now we are enemies . . ."

A quick start of alarm. The sky swiveled away, and Cantrell saw through these other eyes a group of horsemen bearing down on his host. A shrill scream of terror, an intolerable wave of revulsion and regret, and then the blankness of death. Cantrell's host had been ridden under the hooves of the horsemen.

The psychologist, not believing what he had experienced, reached out with his mind and seized on one of the riders. He did know that there was a sense of guilt in the rider's mind; what it meant he could not tell. He heard a conversation begun with a shrill, nervous laugh. Then: "Damned rebel—we showed him."

"Right. Fix them all up like that and this world will be worth living on, sir. Where do we go now?"

"Keep scouting. Look for rebels and treat them the right way, like that dead thing back there—"

Cantrell had suddenly lost interest in the conversation. The talk of rebels was beyond him anyway. He had been studying, through his host's eyes, the costume of the riders. They

were unfamiliar, and somehow totally alien to anything earthly. Then, with a shock of terror Cantrell saw that the horses had peculiarly long heads—and six legs!

HE TORE THE set from his head and stared, wide-eyed, at Boyle. "Where were you?" he demanded. There was a shrill, hysterical note in his voice.

"Trying to get over," said Boyle as he switched off the set. "But there was interference. We'll have to go farther yet. I tuned in on a series of love-affairs from back on Earth."

"Sure of that?" countered Cantrell. "Are you sure it was from Earth that you got the vibrations?"

"Why?" snapped Boyle. "What did you receive?"

Cantrell told him, and Boyle sat quietly for a long time, rattling his fingernails on a tabletop. "Yeah," said Boyle at last. "I suspected something like that. Those women reacted in wholly unearthly fashion. The anatomy of these broadcasters is similar, but they aren't homo sapiens."

"Fourth dimension?" wildly hazarded Cantrell. "Could we have tuned in on that?"

"No. For the reason that waves from the fourth dimension would have to be vectorially sub-operative to the seventh power, at least, and the machine would register any abnormal strain like that. No—not the fourth or any dimension except this one. Are there any invisible planets floating around? That alone would explain everything."

"None that I know of, and I used to specialize in astronomy. Maybe—maybe we've caught up with the thought-waves from Earth on a return trip from the end of space? That would explain the talk about rebels."

"And your six-legged horses, of course. Don't be silly. We have to push on and get so damned far away from this spot that we won't even remember where it is. I'm going to gun the ship hard and fast. You get on the polyphone and tell me when the thought-waves from the place begin to weaken and die out."

Boyle squared his jaw at the fuel gage and began to reckon how much they could allow for steerage and headway. How thin they could cut the corners for the return trip to Earth when the problem of the shakes was solved.

Cantrell donned the head set and turned on the machine again. Again he reached out probing fingers into the crazy planet where horses had six legs and you could kill a man because he was a rebel against someone or something unspecified.

On the screen of his mind things began to take shape. He had landed plumb in the brain of a lady who was waiting for a lover whom she pictured as tall and handsome. The lady turned slowly and surveyed a colossal city that rose about her. She was standing just outside its walls. They were fine walls, solid and ponderous, fitted with gates able to withstand the charge of a battletank.

Her lover strolled up and there was a tender scene of greeting. Cantrell, feeling like a cad, reached out for another mind. He lighted on the brain of a person within the city; a person who considered himself as being of vast importance. All sorts of ponderous speculations were revolving through the important person's head, principally when he would eat next: A young man, clad in a sort of tunic, approached.

The important person smiled. "Ah," he cried. "My dear boy!"

The dear boy grinned briefly.

"You'd better come. There's a strike on at the tubing works. They seized possession of the whole plant." The important person exploded with rage, swearing by strange gods. Cantrell shut off power and looked up.

"When," he asked impatiently, "are you going to get going? It comes in as strong as ever."

Boyle stared at him with a kind of sickly horror in his face. "Cantrell," he said, "since you put on that set we've gone half a million miles at right angles to our former course."

"Lord," whispered his partner. "They're following us!"

FROM RANDOM SNATCHES of thought, and casual, everyday conversation it is not easy, it is almost impossible in fact, to reconstruct the politics, biology and economics of an entire planet. Yet that, essentially, was what Boyle and Cantrell had to do. For flee where they might, nearer to or farther from Earth, they could not escape the vibrations from the land where horses had six legs.

From long periods of listening in and comparing, they discovered one important fact: that evolution was proceeding on that planet at a staggeringly rapid pace; that in fact the two partners had started out with a violently mistaken notion of the place's tempo. It was swift, swifter than anything with which they were familiar.

But their eavesdropping made it seem close to normal, for the human brain can accommodate itself to any speed of delivery. It can assimilate and synthesize at a faster rate than either of the two had previously suspected. It was natural that this discovery should wait for a moment like this, for never before had the human

mind been called on to deliver at that rate.

They discovered that the nameless land was tearing along at a scale of one to a million, approximately. When Cantrell had heard the horsemen curse the rebels, that had been the equivalent of the Puritan revolution in England, period of 1650 or thereabouts. A few minutes later he tuned in on a general strike that meant a lapse of about four hundred years.

In two weeks of voyaging through space the strange planet had arrived at a world state which Earth had not yet attained.

Boyle, irritably tuning in on the lunatic planet one day, drew a deep breath. "Cantrell!" he snapped. "Put your set on and follow my mind. I have a conference of astronomers!"

His partner grabbed the ponderous metal bowl and clapped it on, groping out for the familiar mind patterns of Boyle. He caught onto him in about three seconds, then switched to one of Boyle's mental hosts. Through the eyes of that person he saw a sizable hall built up into a structure like the inside of a mushroom. As he studied the other persons in the hall he realized that physical evolution had progressed a few more steps since yesterday, when he had last tuned in on the place.

His host's mood was one of confusion; through it he was speaking to the large gathering: "This symposium has been called on a somewhat abstract question. You all know what it is, I presume; otherwise you would not be astronomers."

"As one looks back towards the glorious dawning days of our science the names of those who were martyred in the cause of truth rise before us. Despots, with their piddling knowledge and tiny telescopes, maintained that the world was round, did

they not? It remained for the genius of our clan to demonstrate that it was a truncated paraboloid.

"Jealous superstition preached that like all other worlds ours had a core of rock in the state of stress fluid; it remained for us to prove that no such thing was true of our world—that we alone of all planets lived upon a shell of rhodium, and that that shell, though inconceivably thick, was not solid, and that our planet was definitely hollow."

Cantrell looked up. "Lord," he said softly. "Oh, Lordy! *Now* I know where those six-legged horses came from."

"Yes," said Boyle as he turned off the machine. "That planet is our ship, and those people are an entire civilization living on the shell of the old *Andros*. No wonder we couldn't get away from them; they were being carried around with us."

"It's perfectly logical," argued Cantrell. "We carry Earth gravity for our own comfort; that's why we drew down a thin but definite atmosphere. Also dust and organic particles which settled on the hull. There was warmth from the inside of the ship, and that wonderful old Swede Arrhenius long ago demonstrated that spores of life are always present in space, driven by light-pressure. They landed on our hull, went through evolutionary stages, a man-like form emerged and is rapidly reaching a more advanced civilization than our own."

"But," grunted Boyle, "that doesn't help us out with the shakes. If they're swarming out there we'll never be able to probe each other. How can we shake them off? Spray acid on the hull?"

"No!" barked Cantrell. "We couldn't do that—they have as much of a right to live as we. Perhaps—

perhaps if we could communicate with them—?"

"Son," raved Boyle, "you've got it! The answer to our prayers! A super-race made to order for the purpose of solving our problems. We'll have to adapt the polyphone; that's the only equipment we have. Son, we're going to make this the most useful interference ever recorded!"

WITH BLOODSHOT EYES and almost trembling fingers Cantrell tuned in the adapted polyphone. Then, through the eyes of a host he was surveying from an apparent altitude of twenty thousand feet a world enclosed in glass.

"Come in," he said to Boyle. "Work toward the most powerful single person you can find." Feeling his own mind augmented by his partner's he probed deep into the glassed-in world, toward the highest building he could find.

He landed in the brain of a highly trained mathematician and felt a swirl of fantastically complicated figures and tables. Then the mathematician walked through an automatic door into the presence of a person whom he regarded with almost holy awe. Cantrell realized then how rapidly the acceleration of evolution had curved upward on this tiny world. The personage was small and weighed down with a staggering amount of braincells that could be seen pulsing and throbbing under a transparent *dura mater*. The skull had been wholly absorbed.

"Right," snapped Cantrell to his partner. "Push it out, son. Make it stick like glue." The two psychologists united their minds in a staggering intellectual effort; there were visible sparks as they fused into one perfect sending outfit. Cantrell, only vaguely conscious of the per-

sonage and the mathematician, saw the former start with alarm and heard him ask as if from a distance: "Do you feel anything?"

"No," said Cantrell's host. "This matter of geodesics—"

"Leave me for a while," said the personage. "I sense a message of great importance." The mathematician exited, and Cantrell abruptly severed his mind from the host. For the first time he found himself to be a point of consciousness hanging before the personage, seeing, hearing and sending.

He raised his hand in a choppy gesture. Boyle nodded, and shut his eyes. Sweat stood out on his brow as he projected the message: "Boyle and Cantrell speaking. Can you hear us?"

The personage jumped as if he had been shot at. He looked around cautiously and said: "I can hear you. But who are you—where are you sending from?" In the language of the mind there is no need of translation; with the polyphone any two rational creatures can communicate.

The psychologists, now working as a perfect team, sent: "Speaking from the inside of your planet. But it isn't a planet; it's our space-ship. We're from Earth—third planet around the sun. But let's skip the formalities. What do you know about—" and they launched into a technical description of the shakes.

"Have you," asked the important personage, "tried polarizing the crystalline lens of the eye? That should do it. It is not, as you thought, a psychodeficiency lesion but—" In clear, concise thought images he gave a complete outline of the cause and cure of spastitis malignans. And he knew what he was talking about, for this personage later announced him-

self to be the Chief Assimilator of the planetary division. He was the one who received all the technical data and assembled it for reference and use. Specialization had raced ahead on this planet.

"Thanks," said the psychologists at length. "Thanks a lot. We'll be heading back to Earth now—" he broke off in dismay. "If we do, that's the end of your people. Because as soon as our gravity plates switch off you get flung out into space, and we can't land without switching off the plates."

"An interesting problem," brooded the Assimilator. "But not insoluble. We can make our own plates if necessary. I advise you to set your ship—my planet—into an independent orbit around the Sun. In about twenty minutes of your time we will have developed to the point where we will have our enclosed cities reinforced against anything but collision with a major planet. We trust you to set the orbit so that that will not happen. You must return to Earth by some makeshift means." The Assimilator fell into a deep study, and the two psychologists withdrew.

Boyle glanced at a stop-watch. "That whole interview," he said disbelievingly, "lasted exactly one one-thousandth of a second. That was thinking under pressure." Cantrell was dashing onto paper what the Assimilator had told him about the shakes. And it made brilliant sense. He photographed his notes and handed a copy to Boyle.

"And now?" asked Boyle, carefully buttoning the data into a pocket.

"Now we take the lifeboat," said Cantrell. He gestured distastefully at the little bullet of metal lugged to the wall. "It's said to be the least pleasant way of travel known to

man." He turned to the control panel and set a simple course around the sun that would maintain itself after the fuel was wholly gone.

JAMMED INTO THE little craft, cans of food floating about their ears and a hammering roar of exhausts in their heads, they strained to see through the little port that was the only communication from the outside. Boyle yelled something inaudible.

"What?" shrieked Cantrell into his ear.

Boyle drew a great breath and pointed with one thumb at the little crescent of light behind them—the *Andros*. "I said," he shrieked, "that it's a good thing we got away from those submicroscopic Einsteins. They gave me an inferiority complex."

Cantrell grinned briefly and strained his eyes to see until the world they had made was quite invisible in the black of space.

DENVENTION!

AN EDITORIAL

For several months now, everybody who reads science-fiction has been noting the various statements in all the magazines about the Science Fiction Convention to be held in Denver this year. This magazine has not been free from such references.

We are pleased, however, to make a final definite announcement of the affair, and we hope that all who are in a position to do so can take advantage of it. Science-fiction fans have made it a regular custom to hold an annual get-together for the purpose of talking over their favorite reading and exchanging ideas on the future and on fantasy, of meeting the writers and editors whose works they have followed all year round. At these gatherings, *science-fiction* functions as a human group—and in so doing is unique among all types of literature.

This year the Science Fiction Convention is being held in Denver, Colorado, on July 4th, 5th and 6th. The location of Denver was chosen in order to enable Western readers to attend—hitherto all such affairs had been held in the East. Yet many Easterners will make the trip. And a host of writers and editors, too. The guest of honor of the convention will be Robert Heinlein, one of the leading writers and a remarkable personality.

The place of the gathering will be at the Hotel Shirley-Savoy, in the Colorado and Centennial Rooms. It will start with an informal gathering the morning of the Fourth. Getting under way, it will go into formal session, introduce personalities, hear speeches by fantasy's leaders, see a play, possibly a film, continuing through July 5th and 6th with discussions, costume parties, and finally a banquet. A special feature will be the traditional auction of originals from the illustration-files of the various magazines (including this one).

Sponsor of the Convention is the Colorado Fantasy Society, composed of fans all over the nation who have subscribed especially for that purpose. Director is Olon F. Wiggins; Secretary-Treasurer is Lew Martin, of 1258 Race St., Denver, who will be glad to answer all queries.

We urge that you endeavor to attend the convention. You will never regret it, you will never forget it. To summarize:—The date: July 4th, 5th, 6th. The place:—The Shirley-Savoy, Denver, Colorado. The purpose:—To put on the biggest, best and most interesting gathering of science-fiction readers, writers and editors in history! We'll be looking for you.

Donald A. Wolheim, Editor.

THE COLOSSUS OF MAIA

by Lawrence Woods

(Author of "Strange Return," "Black Flames," etc.)



There, in the depths of space, floated the body of an Earthman, but it was the body of a giant sixty feet tall!

IN THE DISC of the tele-screen, the well-known features of Michael Boyer appeared; simultaneously throughout the nation a medley of ohs and ahs emanated from the lips of eligible, unmated young women. It was not exactly that Boyer was handsome—his hair was too sparse and his nose too thin. But there was something about those mobile features and clipped voice that excited women and brought forth infatuation. As for the males of the nation—for the most part, they rather liked him too, called him a right guy, spoke of him in terms of slight amusement, and let

it go at that. No pantywaist, this Michael Boyer, at any rate.

"Cheerio," Boyer was saying with a belying grin. Then, for the veriest instant he hesitated, his face taking on a more serious expression. The tens of thousands of enraptured femininity leaned forward, breathing more rapidly. They knew what that hesitation, followed by the serious look meant: today's report would be a human interest story—something different.

"Our story begins on Earth-Mars voyage number 668 on the Liner *Peter Penguin*, named after the cartoon character which was so popular a few years back. The first officer, Lt. Arthur Rockwell, is on duty in the control room. Fifteen days out; Mars will be reached in three days more. The ship has long since been rotated so that it approaches Planet 4 rockets-on, ready to splash-fire for deceleration 8. The controls are set; there is nothing for Rockwell to do but watch the dials and be prepared for an emergency breakdown—something which has not occurred for the past three years.

"Suddenly an alarm-bell rings from the gravitometer. Most of you have seen pictures of this device, if you haven't had occasion to look over a space-liner. But, for the benefit of those of you who may not, I'll describe it for you. It's a small iron ball, about an inch in diameter, suspended in vacuo, centered in a large glass globe. Electro-magnets at top and bottom keep it there; along the equator of this transparent globe, at 90 degree intervals, are set four instruments: the two in the side, open to view, are photoselenic cells; diametrically opposite each of these is a lens. Two beams of ultraviolet light, crossing each other in the middle, constantly focus on their respec-

tive cells. But the light does not reach those cells because the iron ball, stationed in the center, blocks the flow of beams perfectly.

"This is the gravitometer. Can you picture it? Carefully adjusted to the ship's pull, and that of known astronomical bodies, the ball remains in the center of the sphere. But let some unknown body approach the ship, and its gravital drag will draw the ball in that direction; ever so slightly it will be drawn out of alignment. Immediately a tiny ray of light from one or the other of the beams finds its way past so that it falls on the cell. An automatic alarm is set off; thus the approaching body is sighted and avoided.

"Rockwell leaps to his feet, checks the oncoming direction of the body from the dials connected with the gravitometer, then trains the finder through a port. He sees a point of light, indicating the body which influenced the instrument; rapidly calculates; it will pass close to the ship, but not too close.

"He watches as it grows larger; a puzzled look comes over his face—can this be a meteor? He strains his eyes trying to make out the details."

BOYER'S FACE edged closer to the screen; his voice dropped. Throughout the nation his listeners likewise drew themselves closer unthinkingly.

"Suddenly his face turns white; he gasps, staggers back. Then he puts his eye to the finder's lens again as if unable to trust his senses. Yes, it is! He turns on the automatic cameras, rings for the Captain, and paces nervously about the room as he waits.

"In a moment Commander Benson appears, turns to the telescope at Rockwell's motion. He, too, stares in-

tently and gasps. The two look at each other, then Rockwell whispers: "What did you see, sir?"

"The Captain starts to speak, then stops. 'Impossible!' he murmurs as he turns again to the finder. 'Impossible!' They shut off the camera, quickly wheel it into the darkroom. Again Benson turns to the finder. 'Impossible!' he murmurs again and again, then, as Rockwell beckons him over to the chart-table where a fresh print has been laid out, 'but it is there.'

The two both look out the port, for, by now, the thing has approached close enough to be visible to the naked eye. In a few moments, it will be observable to the passengers in the observation center. Rockwell whispers to Benson: "It's a body, sir, isn't it?"

"Benson nods: 'Yes, it's a body, but—

"'But it's too large.' Yes, floating in space is the body of a man, naked save for a ragged loincloth of some nondescript material. A young man, well-featured, brown hair, his blue eyes staring ahead sightlessly, his mouth set in an enigmatic smile. The features and build are decidedly Anglo-Saxon.

"But the most brain-staggering thing about this corpse is its size. It is fully sixty feet long from toes to crown, floating silently through the void in an orbit of its own.

"Now, from the ship, come cries; the passengers have seen it. Commander and officer stare at each other, a new thought in their minds. Whence came this thing? A planet of giants? A member of the crew of some extra-Solarian explorer from beyond the realm of stars? Or perhaps some unfortunate inhabitant of a world torn apart millions of years past in the endless vistas of the

universe, a body floating aimlessly through the void ever since? Could any of these be the solution to the mystery?

"Several hours later, Rockwell looks up from a mass of calculations. 'I've got it, sir,' he says simply. 'It comes from the asteroids, from asteroid number 66. The given name of this one is Maia; its orbit goes straight there and apparently originated there.'

"What is known about Maia? This thought is uppermost in their minds. But little can be found. None has ever been known to have landed there; Maia is but a midge among the many thousand worldlets that make up the asteroids."

Boyer paused a moment, ruffling a sheaf of papers to which he referred at times. In the background, appropriate music swelled, then died.

"**IT IS A MONTH** later. A small ship is rocketing its way through the asteroid belt, dodging every little while as its reflectors warn of approaching danger. All around it space is filled with tiny glowing discs of light. Each is visibly moving; each close, dangerously close to the ship. Every once in a while one of these lights will seem to flare up, seem to grow tremendously as it comes directly at the craft. No human could possibly work the controls with the delicate swiftness required. But, as the danger approaches, an automatic reflex senses it; simultaneously comes the spurt of a rocket jet, just enough to shunt the ship aside thus to avoid the danger.

"Lt. Rockwell calls out, 'Maia dead ahead; we'll land in an hour.'

"The other occupant of the scout-ship comes forward. He, too, had been on the *Peter Penguin* when the

monstrous corpse was sighted. Rockwell has been detailed to accompany Dr. Burton on this research-trip. Maia is close now; its disc can be made out plainly. A small planet, about twenty miles in diameter as Burton measures it.

"The ship decelerates, then swings in close and circles. They can see the surface unrolling before them. A strange little planet, containing an atmosphere, hills, mountains, rivers, seas, and oceans. Almost an Earth in miniature. But the highest mountain is only a few feet high; the oceans are shallow lakes, and the widest rivers are but tiny trickles. Vegetation is here; green moss and lichens. Is this world filled with tiny animals and microscopic fish?

"They come to a desert region. Here, for several miles (hundreds in proportion to the other land on the little world) barren ground rolls. It is broken here and there by canyons less than a foot deep at the most. Suddenly Burton seizes the other by the shoulder. 'Look!' he exclaims, pointing.

"It is a cabin. . . A small, one-room building made up of mud and clay packed together to form a sort of adobe. And it is large, about ten feet high, quite Earth-size. Behind it is a deep pit where the materials were dug; before it is a cleared path leading to where a river flows through the desert. Along the banks of this river are plants—earth plants. Wheat, corn, flowers. Lining the bank for at least a mile on each side, this strange garden flourishes, although it is but a few feet thick.

"And now, in the desert, they see something else. A wreck. It is the remains of a small space ship. They circle and land beside the river, testing the atmosphere while so doing. It is breathable, but they will need

air helmets and air condensers to make the required pressure.

"Rockwell lands first. He puts his feet on the ground, carefully takes a step, and goes up about thirty feet; his weight on this world is less than one pound. Burton quickly gets superweighted shoes for the two of them, but, even so, their weight is less than a half-dozen pounds and walking is unnecessary. All they have to do is to lift their feet off the ground and flap their arms—they can fly quite as well as if they were birds.

"'Look at that wheat,' calls Burton. It is giant wheat, towering at least twenty feet into the air. At length, they come to the clay hut, descend to the ground and enter. It is a one-room affair—a stove, two beds, a table, shelves well-stocked with a large variety of utensils and books. One is lying open on the table—a diary." Boyer paused again, smiling slightly. "Tomorrow, at this same time, I shall reveal the amazing contents of this diary"—he held up a small volume so that all could see—"which contains the secret of the colossus of Maia."

BOYER COUGHED slightly, ruffled the leaves of the Diary. "Much of this," he began, "is repetitive. I have, however, selected a series of annotations which give a complete story without going into too many unimportant details. There are no dates mentioned here—naturally, the writer would have little or no way of reckoning Earth-time on Maia. I now quote from the diary of Richard Lyman."

My name is Richard Lyman. I was a passenger on the small space-ship *Astrodart*, en route to Ganymede, third moon of Jupiter, along with my wife and

seven-year-old son. We were passing the meteor belt when the ship was struck and thrown out of control. We finally crashed here on this planetoid; only my son and I survived. The air here is very thin, and breathing is difficult. Also, there is difficulty in walking because our weight is so slight as to be negligible. I have salvaged enough food from the wreck to keep us going for an indefinite period, and there is a small, two-foot stream nearby where we can get fresh water.

—I have managed to build a hut, making bricks out of clay mixed with water, thus making quite a credible little home. It is furnished with things salvaged from the wreck and we are living comfortably enough. David used to cry often, as he missed his mother. But I have taught him not to give way to tears; he must learn to aid me. He eats heartily, however.

—I have planted some corn and wheat recovered from the wreck, putting them along the banks of the stream. As yet, there has not been time to explore this world thoroughly, simple a matter as it should be due to the ease of moving about.

—The crops are growing amazingly fast. It is only a few weeks since they were planted and already they are full size. This little planet revolves on its axis every thirty hours by my watch, but I cannot tell how accurate the watch is in relation to Earth-time. The days and nights are warm enough—the days even hot; that will be good for the corn. It must be the thin atmosphere.

—I have just finished walking

all the way around this world. It is only 59½ miles in circumference, and, due to the light gravity, it was no trouble at all. A strange world, this: there are continents and oceans just as on Earth, but all are so very small. I was able to sit on mountain tops and let my feet rest on valley floors. And they are real mountains, too—that is what is most difficult to grasp. When you see them and note the rock strata and geologic markings, exactly of the same type as on Terrestrial mountains, it is really breath-taking to realize that they are not the boulders that their size might indicate. I have actually waded across oceans, the deepest of which came up to my neck. And, strangest of all, is the life on this world. There are tiny, almost microscopic, fish in the water. The land is green with mosses and growths that bear a great resemblance to trees a few inches high. There are tiny animals as small as, and, for the most part, smaller than insects. I am afraid that I must have slaughtered thousands of them by accidently stepping on them. A bridge on this world would be a tiny twig set across a trickle. I wouldn't recognize it. It is like having a world all your own; I am actually growing to like it here.

—Dave is nine today. I brought a strange thing to account now. During all the time we have been here, he has been growing at a prodigious rate. He eats a terrific amount to keep up with it. I have to skimp quite often on my own meals.

I measured his height; he is actually eight feet tall. It is un-

believable, especially since he is perfectly proportioned. He has grown over four feet in the two years we have been here, seems to be trying to overtake the wheat which reached fifteen feet. I measured myself, too; when I came here, I was five feet eleven; now I am six feet four. This is strange—a man of 37 doesn't grow any taller, yet I am growing. It is quite slow as compared to David, but fast enough. I cannot understand it.

—We have extended our crops, managing now to get a little more to eat than before. We are now satisfactorily set for the first time, having found that we can eat some of the natural minute growths of this planet. To do so, however, would necessitate deforesting the globe eventually, so we content ourselves with our own food. It grows monotonous, but we have to bear it. There is no meat at all, so we are vegetarians. But we can fish; David walked five miles to the ocean (it only takes a few minutes) and set a net of cheese cloth. We got quite a number of whales. Yes, real whales, the size of minnows. We eat them as a rare delicacy, prepared like sardines.

—**I** HAVE BEEN teaching David as usual, intending to educate him as best I can. I am telling him about Earth and customs there. He remembers a great deal, of course; still, a child's impressions are sometimes quite a bit garbled and vague. He's a bright boy—an odd thing to say when he is taller than I am.

—It is now three years since

we landed here; three Earth-years, that is. I have to go on the basis of my watch which is still running well. A year on this asteroid, I have calculated, must be around 1587 Earth days, but I cannot be sure. Life has become very dull save for my teaching David. He has grown astoundingly, now being ten feet high. I am six feet eight; the plants grew to twenty feet, then stopped. I think I am beginning to solve the enigma of our growth.

—It is due to the gravity or rather, the lack of gravity. On this world, we weigh practically nothing. Actually, I weigh a little over a pound—although the term has no meaning here. Now, what about growth: why do we grow to only six feet on Earth? It is because, among other things, our weight slows down our body. The glands of growth are impeded by this. Growth is a constant battle between gravity and the glands; somewhere in the twenties we stop. This growth is controlled by the pituitary gland at the base of the brain and aided somewhat by other organs. On Earth, this gland is powerful enough to enable us to reach six feet in twenty years; that is, of course, in round numbers. Now David is growing; his glands are working at Earth speed and as strong as if he were on Earth. But he isn't; the gravity here is so small as to be negligible, thus his glands have it all their own way; his growth is unimpeded by weight. He will continue to grow at a terrific pace till he is mature. How tall he will be then, I hesitate to calculate.

As for myself: why do I keep growing although I matured long ago? It is because the other glands also have something to do with growth. They help to replace my worn out body cells by growing new ones. Cells are always being worn out, a natural process. But, with the loss of gravity, even this renewing of cells is able to cause one to grow taller. Of course, it is nothing like the pace at which David is growing. My height will never be beyond that of the Earth giants.

—What about the natural inhabitants of Maia: why aren't they gigantic, too? It is because they evolved here; a tiny creature is more natural to a tiny world. They are about the same size in relation to Maia as Terrestrials are to Earth. To them, Maia is as large as Earth, its atmosphere as thick, its oceans as deep and as wide. It is we who are out of proportion. The idea is amazing, but perfectly logical.

MICHAEL BOYER looked up. "Lyman was stretching the case, quite a bit, of course," he smiled. "If the fauna and flora of Maia was in proportion to the size of Maia as Terrestrial flora and fauna are to Earth's diameter, then he and David could not have discovered them with a microscope. To go on with the diary . . ."

—We have been making a map of Maia, getting great delight out of naming the various places. There is, for example, David Ocean and Richard Ocean, Triangle Continent and Lyman Continent. We have given romantic names to everything.

One large body of land we named Tuttle Continent after the man who discovered this world. I might mention here that our cabin is situated in the middle of Astrodart Desert, close by the River Nile which flows from Gnome Mountains to the David Sea.

—We both sleep outdoors at night; indeed, David can no longer come inside; he is too big.

—David has extended our crops. He has proceeded to cut a canal a mile long diverting another river to ours. This work took only a few days. He is quite strong even for his size and it is easy for him. He says that he will need plenty of food, setting out also to plant wheat and corn seeds by all the rivers and waters nearby. It will go hard with the native vegetation.

—Four years. We expect fully to live our lives here. No space ships visit the asteroids—they would never come to this world save by accident. Why do I keep this diary, I wonder?

David is now thirteen feet tall, even though he is only eleven years old. As for myself, I am seven feet tall. Not much difference now, though; I am used to seeing my son grow. He is taller every morning; it is detectable at once.

Our life has settled down to a dull routine. David is busy at the present time exploring the ocean bottoms. All he has to do is stand in the middle of the oceans, hold his breath, and plunge his head under water. He can thus observe at first hand the contours of the sea bottom; he thinks he has discovered several lost continents.

As for myself, the only kick I get out of life is lying for hours on my stomach at the edge of the desert where the forest comes right up to it. I have a magnifying glass in hand and stare through it at the tiny animals going about their business. Most of them are insect-like, but I am sure some of them are mammals or reptiles. However, they resemble none on earth.

—Seven years have passed since the wreck. Three since I last made a note in this book. I had almost forgotten about it. But I decided to keep it up. David is a full twenty-five feet as best as I can measure; I am eight. He no longer lives with me; he is afraid of doing damage to the cabin and the crops. He emigrated to Triangle Continent on the other side of the world; there he lives, having uprooted most of the native plants there and flattened out the ground. He's planted his own fields all over the place so that the planet looks like a vast farm; the desert cabin and river crops are mine. To irrigate his great farm he has dug many canals across his land from the seas; thus we still manage to get enough food. He is still young, only fourteen years old. I am sure that he pines for more company but he does not reveal this to me; I am used to being a hermit.

—In these years I have been making a catalogue and classification of all the different forms of life on Maia. I've rigged up a simple microscope out of several lenses salvaged from broken astronomical instruments. With this, I have discovered and classi-

fied thousands of varieties of flora and fauna, made studies of their life-habits. One must do something; I haven't found any intelligent beings yet.

IT IS DAVID'S eighteenth birthday. He is here with me tonight, or rather, outside in the desert, sleeping. I measured him today; he lay flat on the ground and I walked from his head to his toes with a measure. He is a little over forty-three feet tall. In order for us to converse, he must whisper; even that is deafening. He has to lie down for me to yell in his ear; the result is that we do not talk much. He has succeeded in making his grain reach a height of forty feet by selective breeding and careful planting. I shall not try this myself as I have difficulty in harvesting my huge stalks anyway. He tells me I am becoming old; I believe him; the hermit's life does not agree with me.

David is quite moody. He is tired of being alone, says there is no hope for him or anything to live for. If a rescue ship did come, it could take me, but never him. He would be unable to live anywhere except Maia, and there is no joy in living here. He wants to commit suicide, but he will not do so because of me. I fear for him when I am gone.

—It is over fourteen years since we have been stranded here. Earth is like a dream. But, the time has passed quickly, now that I look back on it. I am old—very much older than I would be on Earth, I know. Haven't been feeling well for a long time—I have a bad cough

and a dull pain in my heart. David is very anxious about me, with me all the time. He is a regular colossus, too—over sixty feet tall.

I fear I have not long to live. David looks up at the sky strangely, sometimes. Especially at that tiny green star that is Earth. There is something in his mind, but he will not tell me what it is. My chest pains again.

MICHAEL BOYER closed the book softly. "That," he whispered, "is the last entry. There is, however, a little more.

"We must go back with Rockwell and Burton to Maia. They have just found the book; have just read the final entry. In the cabin are to be found the notebooks of which Richard Lyman speaks, the notebooks wherein he painstakingly and scientifically classified the flora and fauna of the asteroid.

"They search about the cabin from a position in the air. Suddenly, behind the cabin, Rockwell sights something. They descend; it is a cemetery. Here are several rude mounds and improvised head pieces. On pieces of metal are scratched names—the names of the passengers who had been killed in the first crash of the *Astrodart*. Over to one side is a mound larger than the rest; just before it, they notice long cuts in the ground. Rockwell studies one of them; it is in the form of the letter "R". He propels himself into the air so as to look down upon the ground, calling Burton as he does so. There, around the mound, cut in letters six feet long, is the name RICHARD LYMAN.

"What has become of the son? They search around for a clue; at

length they find another cut in the ground—an arrow pointing out into the desert.

"Out there they come upon more writing, cut into the face of the planet in letters ten to fifteen feet high. It is the last message of David Lyman: 'Father died yesterday; I buried him in the cemetery. I do not want to live any more; there is nothing here for me without him. I cannot take life calmly the way he did; I am young—but I cannot enjoy the rights of youth to companionship, love, or adventure. Never could I be rescued; I am too large. Already, I find it hard to breathe because of my great size—and I am still growing.

"The horizon is so close here I am always afraid of falling off. I am going to end it all tonight when Earth comes out—I shall run across the desert and leap with all my might. My body will take an orbit that someday will bring it within that of Mars. Perhaps someday a space ship will find me; then maybe they will take me home. I would rather die on Earth than live on Maia any longer.' It was signed David Lyman.

"Rockwell and Burton follow the footprints across the desert, the prints of bare soles nine feet long. Soon they see where the prints become farther and farther apart, as if the maker had been running and bounding. Then, finally, they come to the last set; deep down they are dug, and much dirt is thrown back as if a tremendous being had made one vast terrific leap there. A leap out into the realm of the airless void—a leap," and here Boyer's voice caught a little, "that would bring a son of Earth back to his native home."



THE CITY IN THE SOFA

by Cecil Corwin

(Author of "The Reversible Revolutions," "Thirteen O'Clock," etc.)

Soldier-of-fortune Battle received his toughest assignment when he was sent to the Billionaire's Club to fumigate a sofa! The fate of a world depended upon it!

LIEUTENANT J. C. BATTLE tweaked the ends of his trim little military moustache and smiled brilliantly at the cashier.

"Dear lady," he said, "there seems to have been some mistake. I could have sworn I'd put my wallet in this suit—"

The super-blonde young lady looked bored and crooked a finger at the manager of the cafeteria. The manager crooked a finger at three muscular busboys, who shambled over to the exit.

"Now," said the manager, "what seems to be the trouble?"

The lieutenant bowed. "My name," he said, "is Battle. My card, sir." He presented a pasteboard square which bore the crest of the United States Marines and the legend:

LIEUTENANT J. C. BATTLE,
SOLDIER OF FORTUNE
REVOLUTIONS A SPECIALTY

"A phony," said the manager with the wickedest of smiles. "A dead-beat. The check says thirty cents, Major—do you cough up or wash dishes?" He flung the card aside, and an innocent-appearing old man, white-haired, wrinkled of face and shabbily dressed, who had been patiently waiting to pay his ten cent check, courteously stooped and tapped the manager on the shoulder.

"You dropped this," he said politely, extending the card.

"Keep it," snarled the manager. The innocent old man scanned the card and stiffened as though he had been shot.

"If you will allow me," he said, interrupting Battle's impassioned plea for justice, "I shall be glad to pay this young man's check." He fished out an ancient wallet and dropped a half dollar into the super-blonde's hand.

"May I have your address, sir?" asked Battle when they were outside. "I shall mail you the money as soon as I get back to my club."

The old man raised a protesting hand. "Don't mention it," he smiled toothlessly. "It was a pleasure. In fact I should like you to come with me to my club." He looked cautiously around. "I think," he half-whispered, "that I have a job for you, Lieutenant—if you're available."

"Revolution?" asked Battle, sceptically surveying the old man, taking in every wrinkle in the suit he wore. "I'm rather busy at the moment, sir, but I can recommend some very able persons who might suit you as well. They do what might be called a cut-rate business. My price is high, sir—very high."

"Be that as it may, lieutenant. My club is just around the corner. Will you follow me, please?"

Only in New York could you find a two-bit cafeteria on a brightly lit avenue around the corner from the homes of the wealthy on one side and the poor on the other. Battle fully expected the old man to cross the street and head riverwards; instead he led the soldier of fortune west towards Central Park.

Battle gasped as the old man stopped and courteously gestured him to enter a simple door in an old-style marble-faced building. Disbelievingly he read the house number.

"But this is—" said Battle, stuttering a little in awe.

"Yes," said the old man simply. "This is the Billionaire's Club."

IN THE SMOKING room Battle eased himself dazedly into a chair upholstered with a priceless Gobelin tapestry shot through by wires of pure gold. Across the room he saw a man with a vast stomach and a nose like a pickled beet whom he recognized as "Old Jay." He was shaking an admonishing finger at the stock-market plunger known as the "Cobra of Canal Street."

"Where you should put your money," Old Jay rumbled—as Battle leaned forward eagerly, the rumble dropped to a whisper. The Cobra jotted down a few notes in a solid silver memo pad and smiled gratefully. As he left the room he nodded at a suave young man whom the lieutenant knew to be the youngest son of the Atlantis Plastic and Explosive dynasty.

"I didn't," said Battle breathlessly, "I didn't catch the name, sir."

"Cromleigh," snapped the old man who had brought him through the fabulous portals. "Ole Cromleigh,

'Shutter-shy,' they call me. I've never been photographed, and for a very good reason. All will be plain in a moment. Watch this." He pressed a button.

"Yessir?" snapped a page, appearing through a concealed door as if by magic.

Cromleigh pointed at a rather shabby mohair sofa. "I want that fumigated, sonny," he said. "I'm afraid it's crummy."

"Certainly, sir," said the page. "I'll have it attended to right away, sir." He marched through the door after a smart salute.

"Now study that sofa," said Cromleigh meditatively. "Look at it carefully and tell me what you think of it."

The Lieutenant looked at it carefully. "Nothing," he said at length and quite frankly. "I can't see a thing wrong with it, except that beside all this period furniture it looks damned shabby."

"Yes," said Ole Cromleigh. "I see." He rubbed his hands meditatively. "You heard me order that page to fumigate it, eh? Well—he's going to forget all about those orders as completely as if I'd never delivered them."

"I don't get it," confessed Battle. "But I'd like you to check—for my benefit."

Cromleigh shrugged and pressed the button again. To the page who appeared, he said irascibly: "I told you to have that sofa fumigated—didn't I?"

The boy looked honestly baffled. "No, sir," he said, wrinkling his brows. "I don't think so, sir."

"All right, sonny. Scat." The boy disappeared with evident relief.

"That's quite a trick," said Battle. "How do you do it?" He was absolutely convinced that it was the same

boy and that he had forgotten all about the incident.

"You hit the nail on the head, young man," said Cromleigh leaning forward. "I didn't do it. I don't know who did, but it happens regularly." He looked about him sharply and continued: "I'm owing-gay oo-tay eek-spay in ig-pay atin-Lay. Isten-lay."

And then, in the smoking room of the Billionaire's Club, the strangest story ever told was unreeled—in pig-Latin!—for the willing ears of Lieutenant J. C. Battle, Soldier of Fortune. And it was the prelude to his strangest job—the strangest job any soldier of fortune ever was hired for throughout the whole history of the ancient profession.

BATTLE WAS BEWILDERED.

He stared about himself with the curious feeling of terrified uncertainty that is felt in nightmares. At his immediate left arose a monstrous spiral mountain, seemingly of metal-bearing ore, pitted on the surface and crusted with red rust.

From unimaginable heights above him filtered a dim, sickly light . . . beneath his feet was a coarse stuff with great ridges and interstices running into the distance. Had he not known he would never have believed that he was standing on wood.

"So this," said Battle, "is what the inside of a mohair sofa is like."

Compressed into a smallness that would have made a louse seem mastodontic, he warily trod his way across huge plains of that incredible worm's-eye wood, struggled over monstrous tubes that he knew were the hairy padding of the sofa.

From somewhere, far off in the dusk of this world of near night, there was a trampling of feet, many feet. Battle drew himself on the

alert, snapped out miniature revolvers, one in each hand. He thought briskly that these elephant-pistols had been, half an hour ago, the most dangerous handguns on Earth, whereas here—well?

The trampling of feet attached itself to the legs of a centipede, a very small centipede that was only about two hundred times the length of the Lieutenant. Its sharp eyes sighted him, and rashly the creature headed his way.

The flat crash of his guns echoing strangely in the unorthodox construction of this world, Battle stood his ground, streaming smoke from both pistols. The centipede kept on going.

He drew a smoke-bomb and hurled it delicately into the creature's face. The insect reared up and thrashed for a full second before dying. As Battle went a long way around it, it switched its tail, nearly crushing the diminished soldier of fortune.

After the equivalent of two miles' walk he saw before him a light that was not the GE's, filtering down from the smoking room of the Billionaire's Club, but a bright, chemical flare of illumination.

"It's them," breathed the Lieutenant. "In person!" He crouched behind a towering wood-shaving and inspected the weird scene. It was a city that spread out before him, but a city the like of which man's eyes had never before seen.

A good, swift kick would have sent most of it crashing to the ground, but to the tiny Lieutenant it was impressive and somehow beautiful. It was built mostly of wood-splinters quarried from the two-by-fours which braced the sofa; the base of the city was more of the same, masticated into a sort of papier-mache platform. As the soldier of fortune

looked down on it from the dizzy height of two feet, he felt his arms being very firmly seized.

"What do we do about this?" demanded a voice, thin and querulous. "I never saw one this size."

"Take him to the Central Committee, stupid," snapped another. Battle felt his guns being hoisted from their holsters and snickered quietly. They didn't know—

Yes they did. A blindfold was whipped about his eyes and his pockets and person were given a thorough going-over. They even took the fulminate of mercury that he kept behind his molars.

"Now what?" asked the first voice. Battle could picture its owner gingerly handling the arsenal that he habitually carried with him.

"Now," said the second voice, "now freedom slowly broadens down." *Clunk!* Battle felt something—with his last fighting vestige of consciousness he realized that it was one of his own gun-butts—contact his head, then went down for the count.

THE NEXT THING he knew a dulcet voice was cooing at him. The Lieutenant had never heard a dulcet voice before, he decided. There had been, during his hitch with the Foreign Legion, one Messoua whose voice he now immediately classified as a sort of hoarse cackle. The blonde Hedvig, Norwegian spy he had encountered in service with Los Invincibles de Bolivia had seemed at the time capable of a dulcet coo; Battle reallocated the Norse girl's tones as somewhere between a rasp and a metallic gurgle.

The voice cooed at him: "Get up, stupid. You're conscious."

He opened his eyes and looked for the voice as he struggled to his feet. As he found the source of the coo he

fell right flat on his back again. J. C. Battle, soldier-of-fortune extraordinary, highest-priced insurrectionaire in the world, had seen many women in the course of his life. Many women had looked on him and found him good, and he had followed the lead with persistence and ingenuity. His rep as a Lothario stretched over most of the Earth's surface. Yet never, he swore fervently to himself, never had he seen anything to match this little one with the unfriendly stare.

She was somewhat shorter than the Lieutenant and her coloring was the palest, most delicate shade of apple-green imaginable. Her eyes were emerald and her hair was a glorious lushness like the hue of a high-priced golf-club's prize putting-green on a Summer morning. And she was staring at him angrily, tapping one tiny foot.

"Excuse me, madame," said Battle as he rose with a new self-possession in his bearing. He noted that she was wearing what seemed to be a neat little paper frock of shell pink. "Excuse me—I had no notion that it was a lady whom I was keeping waiting."

"Indeed," said the lady coldly. "We'll dispense with introductions, whoever you are. Just tell your story. Are you a renegade?" She frowned. "No, you couldn't be that. Begin talking."

Battle bowed. "My card," he said, tendering it. "I presume you to be in a position of authority over the—?" He looked around and saw that he was in a room of wood, quite unfurnished.

"Oh, sit down if you wish," snapped the woman. She folded herself up on the floor and scrutinized the card.

"What I am doesn't concern you," she said broodingly. "But since you

seem to know something about our plans, know that I am the supreme commander of the—" She made a curious, clicking noise. "That's the name of my people. You can call us the Invaders."

"I shall," began Battle. "To begin at the beginning, it is known that your—Invaders—plan to take over this world of ours. I congratulate you on your location of your people in a mohair sofa; it is the most ingenious place of concealment imaginable. However, so that the sofa will not be fumigated, you must perform operations at long-range—post-hypnotic suggestion—I imagine—on the minds of the servants at the Billionaire's Club. Can you explain to me why you cannot perform these operations on the club-members themselves?"

"Very simple," said the woman sternly, with the ghost of a smile. "Since all the billionaire members are self-made men they insist that even the lowest bus-boy have advanced college degrees and be Phi Beta Kappas. This betokens a certain type of academic mind which is very easy to hypnotize. But even if we worked in twenty-four hour relays on "Old Jay" we couldn't put a dent in him. The psychic insensitivity of a billionaire is staggering.

"And," she added, looking at Battle through narrowed eyes, "there was one member who noticed that the bus-boys never fumigated the sofa. We tried to work on him while he slept, but he fought us back. He even subconsciously acquired knowledge of our plans. Thought he'd dreamed it and forgot most of the details."

Battle sighed. "You're right," he admitted. "Cromleigh was his name, and he tipped me off. Where are you Invaders from?"

"None of your business," she tartly retorted. "And where, precisely, do you come from?"

"This Cromleigh," said Battle, "was—and is—no fool. He went to a psychologist friend and had his mind probed. The result was a complete outline of your civilization and plans—including that ingenious device of yours, the minimifier. He had one built in his lab and paid me very highly to go into it. Then I was dropped by him personally into this sofa with a pair of tweezers."

"How much does he know?" snapped the woman.

"Not much. Only what one of your more feeble-minded citizens let him know. He doesn't know the final invasion plans and he doesn't know the time-schedule—if there is any as yet."

"There isn't," she said with furrowed brow. "And if there were, you imbecile monsters would never learn it from us." Suddenly she blazed at him: "Why must you die the hard way? Why don't you make room for the super-race while you have the chance? But no! We'd never be able to live in peace with you—you—cretins!" Then her lip trembled. "I'm sorry," she said. "I don't mean to be harsh—but there are so few of us and so many of you—" The dam broke, and the little lady dissolved in a flood of tears.

Battle leaped into the breach like a veteran. He scored 99.9807 on the firing range consistently and that was pretty good, but when it came to comforting weeping female soldiers-of-fortune Battle *really* shone.

SOME MINUTES LATER they were chummily propped up against the wall of the wooden room. Her weeps over, the little lady—who

had identified herself as Miss Aktying *click!* Byam—began:

"We come—you could have guessed this from our size—from an asteroid near Jupiter. Don't ask me why my people are so much like yours except for size; after all, why shouldn't they be? Spores of life, you know.

"Our space-ship's somewhere in your New Jersey; we landed there two years ago and sized the situation up. We'd been driven from our own planet by nasty creatures from Ceres who had the damndest war-machines you ever saw. Flame-guns, disintegrator rays—and they're going to mop up the universe when they get around to it. By your standards they were three inches tall; to us they were twenty-foot horrors.

"We sent out a few agents who learned the language in two or three days; we could live on the space-ship and keep out of sight. The agents came back to us all steamed up. They'd been riding in coat pockets and things, listening in on private wires. They found out that most of the wealth in the world is concentrated in the Billionaire's Club, right here where we are. So we moved en masse, all three hundred of us, into this sofa and built our city.

"It isn't as easy as it sounds, of course. To listen in on a conversation means that you have to weigh yourself down with almost an ounce of equipment for raising the octaves of the voice and scaling it down to fit our ears. But now we have our listening posts and we eavesdrop in relays to every word that's spoken. If you knew what I know about Atlantis Plastic and Explosive—

"Anyway, Battle, we have our fingers on the economic pulse of the planet. We could release information through dreams and hunches that would wreck the market, as you call

it, and create the most staggering panic of all times. Once that happens, Battle . . ."

"Go on," snapped the Lieutenant.

"Once that happens, Battle," she said in a small, tense voice, "we turn on a little machine we have and every human being that walks the Earth turns into pocket-fuzz."

She faced his horrified stare with a pitying smile. "It's true," she said. "We can do it. When we're ready, when we're convinced that science and research is so disorganized that they can't possibly do anything about it, we turn on the machine, technically known as a protoplasmo-high carbon proteldic-discellular converter, and it happens."

"Not," grated Battle, "if I can stop it."

"That's the rub, my dear," she said with a frown. "You can't. You're my prisoner." And she smiled exquisitely, baring apple-green teeth, so that Battle was constrained to agree with the little lady.

"It seems fitting," he brooded absently. "A super-race indeed is come to humble man."

"DARLING," SAID BATTLE, "it's the strange mixture of ruthlessness and sentimentality that makes your people perpetually amazing to me. It's a pitched battle in the dark on our part; my people have no notion of what's going on behind their backs, and you see nothing evil or dark in the situation."

Busily Miss Aktying *click!* Byam kissed him and returned to her desk. "My sweet," she said, "if you trouble your head over our alien morality you'll never get to the end of it. Enough that you are accepted into our midst as a non-combatant worker and the very special charge of the

Expediter-in-Chief—that's me. Now go away, please. I'll see you to-night."

Battle pocketed the seal he had lifted from the desk and blew a kiss at her back as he closed the door behind him.

The week he had been imprisoned had been no great hardship; he had been privileged to roam within the limits of the city and examine the marvelously complicated life these tiny invaders had made for themselves. There had been other privileges as well . . .

The lieutenant, professional and romanticized killer, could not get over the appalling technique of the invaders. It was not inefficient, it was not cold-blooded; somehow to him it was worse. Like all right-minded military men of the old school, he deplored the occasional necessity of spying. What then could he think of a campaign that was spying and nothing else but?

He had been allowed to see—under guard—the wonderful listening posts of the tiny people. From little speakers boomed the voices of "Old Jay" and the other Titans of finance who worked off steam in the smoking room of the Billionaire's Club. And nobody ever sat on the sofa or moved it; it simply would never occur to a member to do so, and in the minds of the servants there had been built up a myth that it was the very first sofa that the celebrated and deceased founder of the club, Nicholas VanBroombergen, had installed and that it would be a breach of the club's rules to move it. The fact was that it had been brought in by two men from Airways Express who had had their minds taken over for the nonce by the invaders. A Mrs. Pinsky, for whom it had been originally con-

signed, never did find out what happened to it.

Battle ascertained by judicious inquiry that the pocket-fuzz machine actually did exist. It had been a swipe from the war-science of the invaders from Ceres. The thing was broken down at the moment, but when they got it into shape again—!

He had uneasy pictures of a vast number of speculators all waking up with the same hunch on which way the market would jump. All bidding simultaneously for the same securities would make a ticklish situation that could be touched off by judicious inspiration of an investment banker—any investment banker—who could be dreamed into thinking his bank was without assets. Bank closes and banker commits suicide.

Panic on the market; the vast number of speculators find themselves with securities at fantastically high prices and worth fantastically near nothing at all. Vast number of speculators sell out and are ruined, for then three more banks close and three more bankers commit suicide. President declares bank-holiday; the great public withdraws savings as soon as the banks open again, therefore the banks close again. The great public holes up for a long, hard winter. With loose cash lying around crime is on the upswing and martial law is declared, at which Leftist organizations explode and start minor insurrections in industrial cities.

Mexico attacks across the Rio Grande; the invaders from the asteroid had a contingent of expert hypnotists ready to leave for Chihuahua where the southern republic's army was stationed.

And then the protoplasmo-high carbon proteidic-discellular converter would get turned on. The population of Manhattan would turn into

pocket fuzz — or at least separate large-molecule units resembling very closely the stuff you find in pockets or handbags after two or three weeks of use.

Manhattan is fortified by the wee folk from the asteroid who build several more of the flug-machines, aiming them at the other boroughs and moving their twenty-mile field of effectiveness at the rate of a state each day. The North American continent would be clear of any and all protoplasmic life at the end of a week, they estimated.

And the hell of it was that they were right. But Battle was whistling cheerily as he forged a pass with the aid of the seal from his lady's desk.

HE HAD CREPT out into the open, been perceived by the eagle-eye of old Cromleigh, lifted on a pair of tweezers and whisked into a waiting Rolls.

Once again his natural size in the New Jersey lab he stretched comfortably. "Thanks for being so prompt," he yawned. "Thanks a lot. They were coming after me, by the sound of footsteps in the distance."

"Now you see why I had to be quiet and do this thing on the sly?" demanded the financier. "If I'd told all I know they'd have called me mad and locked me up the way his family treated poor old John Dee. (But don't let that get out, Lieutenant.) Now tell me what you found there—begin at the beginning. How much do they know about finance and manipulation? Have they got their records in a safe place?"

Battle lit a cigarette; he hadn't taken any with him for fear of firing the sofa. Luxuriously he drew in a draft of the smoke clear down to his toenails and let it trickle

from the corners of his mouth. "One question at a time," he said. "And I'll ask the first few of them. Mr. Cromleigh, why won't you let me bomb the sofa?"

The old man twisted his hands nervously together. "Because a bomb in the smoking-room would kill Old Jay when he hears about it; the man always goes to Lhasa in Tibet when July Fourth rolls around. He's been that way since the Wall Street Massacre in '24 or '5. Because I'm not cold-blooded. And because, dammit, those little people I saw were cute."

"Yeah," agreed Battle reminiscently. "That she was. To begin at the beginning, your dream was substantially correct. They're little people from an asteroid. They have war-machinery and no hearts whatsoever. They're listening twenty-four hours a day. Not a word spoken in the room escapes them and it all goes onto records."

"Good — good God!" whispered Cromleigh, cracking his freckled knuckles. "What that information must be worth!" He rose. "Let's get back to Manhattan for a drink, Lieutenant," he said shakily. "And there's another aspect I want to discuss with you. Your first trip was a sort of foray. It was mostly to convince me that I wasn't mad. And to size up the ground as well. Now can we discuss planting a permanent spy in the sofa? To keep tabs on them and move only when necessary?"

"Delightful," said Battle thoughtfully. "I have friends. My own club you probably do not know of, but it is the best of its kind."

CROMLEIGH, NERVOUSLY tapping his desk with a pencil, was alone in the great New Jersey lab

as far as could be seen. Grotesque machinery lined the walls; during the day there would be eight score technicians working, checking and double-checking their results, bringing new honor and glory to the Cromleigh Vacuumaxie Sweeper and the rest of the string of electric products. His sugar plants and labs were far away in Pasadena; the Cromleigh Iron Works were going full blast in the ore basin of the continent. He looked like a very worried man.

From the shadows, with completely noiseless tread, stole a figure. "Good evening, sir," said Battle. "I've brought all of the Sabre Club that's available on two hours' notice.

"Miss Millicent, this is Mr. Cromleigh," he announced, leading forth from the shadows a tall, crisp woman. When she spoke it was with a faint, Southern drawl: "Pleased t' know you. Any frien' of Lieutenant Battle's . . ." She trailed back into the darkness and vanished completely.

"Doctor Mogilov, former Professor of Philosophy at the University of Kazan." A slight, smiling man bowed out from the darkness; he was smooth-shaven and looked very un-Russian. In a pronounced Cambridge dialect he said: "Delighted," and put one hand on the butt of a revolver slung from his slender waist.

"And Alex Vaughn, Yorkshire born and bred." The Englishman said thickly, in the peculiar speech that makes the clear-headed, big-boned men of York sound always a little intoxicated: "Ah coom wi' russi-vek-shins, soor. Lut thawt bay oondair-stud."

"He says," interpreted the Lieutenant, "that he comes with reservations; let that be understood. And that completes the present roster of

the Sabre Club present in New York."

"Only three?" complained Cromleigh. "And one a woman? You gave me to understand that they could completely smash the invaders."

"Yes," said the Lieutenant, his voice heavy with added meaning. "Any invaders."

"No doubt—" said Cromleigh. Then some message in Battle's eyes alarmed him unaccountably; his hand trembled on the desk-top and gripped the edge to steady itself.

"That did it!" snapped Battle. He swung on Ole Cromleigh. "How long have we?" he grated, pulling a gun and aiming for the financier's throat.

In a voice hoarse with hatred Cromleigh yelled: "Just two minutes more, you meddling scum! Then—"

"Lights!" yelled Battle. "Turn the damned lights on, Miss Millicent!" As the overhead indirects flared up, bathing the huge lab in a lambent, flaming radiance, the four figures of the Sabre Club members, the Billionaire Clubman and one other leaped into sharp reality.

It was the figure of the sofa. "We took the liberty," said Battle, his gun not swerving an inch, "of removing this object from the smoking room. It's going lock, stock and barrel into the enlarging machine you have here."

"You fool!" roared Cromleigh. "Don't you know—" The descending gun butt cut off any further conversation.

"Hurry up!" grated the Lieutenant. He hefted the sofa to his broad shoulders. "That trembling hand was a signal if ever I saw one. His friends'll be here any minute. Open that damned machine and plug in the power!"

The Russian philosopher, mutter-

ing wildly to himself, swung wide the gates of the box-like magnifier through which Battle had come only a few hours before.

"Thank God there's plenty of room!" groaned Battle. "And if this doesn't work, prepare for Heaven, friends!" He turned on the machine full power and speed, took Miss Millicent by the arm and dragged her to the far end of the vast lab.

DURING THE INCREDIBLY long three minutes that ensued, they made ready their weapons for what might prove to be a siege, while Battle explained in rapid-fire undertones what he had had no time for during the plane-ride from Manhattan.

As he checked the load of his quick-firers he snapped: "Invaders—fooeys! Anybody could tell that those women were fresh from an office. They had the clerical air about them. The only invader—as a carefully logical process of deduction demonstrated—was the gruesome creature who's been posing as Cromleigh. Just murdered the old guy—I suppose—and took over his body. Him and his friends whom he just signaled. He's the only baby who hypnotized the Phi Beta Kappas they use for busboys.

"Why did he risk sending me in there? The inevitable mark of a louse. Doesn't trust anybody, not even his own office-staff dyed a pale green and reduced to half gnat-size. So he sent me in for a spy on them. The whole cock-and-bull story of the creatures from an asteroid was so that there'd be no suspicion directed at him in case some bright waiter should find the louse-people. Wouldn't be surprised if he's from an asteroid himself. Crazy business! Craziest damned business!"

"How about the financial angle?"

asked Vaughn, who could be intelligible when money was involved.

"I picked that bird's pocket slick as a whistle just before I conked him. Feels like a hundred grand."

"Here they come!" snapped Miss Millicent.

"They" were creatures of all shapes and sizes who were streaming through the only door to the lab, at the other end of the room.

"Awk!" gulped the lady involuntarily. "They" were pretty awful. There were a hundred or so of them, many much like men, a few in an indescribable liquid-solid state that sometimes was gaseous. The luminous insides of these churned wildly about; there were teeth inside them two feet long.

Others were gigantic birds, still others snakes, still others winged dragons.

"That settles it," grunted the Russian philosopher as he flicked his gun into and out of its holster faster than the eye could follow. "That settles it. They are amoebic, capable of assuming any shape at all. One is changing now — awk!" He persevered. "Indubitably possessed of vast hypnotic powers over unsuspecting minds only. Otherwise they would be working on us."

"They" were rolling in a flood of shifting, slimy flesh down the floor of the lab.

"The machine! The sofa!" cried Miss Millicent. Battle breathed a long sigh of relief as the cabinet-like expander exploded outward and the sofa it held kept on growing — and growing—and growing—and *growing*! It stopped just as it filled the segment of the lab that it occupied.

With a squeaking of tortured timbers the laws of cross-sectional sufficiency power asserted themselves

and the hundred-yard-high sofa collapsed in a monstrous pile of rubble.

"Sit very still," said the Lieutenant. "Be quite quiet and blow the head off any hundred-yard centipede that wanders our way."

There were agonized yells from the other side of the couch's ruins. "That couch," Battle informed them, "was just plain lousy. Full of centipedes, lice, what have you. And when a louse smells blood—God help any invaders around, be they flesh, fish, fowl or amoebic!"

AFTER TEN MINUTES there was complete quiet.

"What about the insects?" asked Vaughn.

"They're dead," said Battle, rising and stretching. "Their respiratory system can't keep up with the growth. They were good for about ten minutes, then they keel over. Their tracheae can't take in enough

oxygen to keep them going, which is a very good thing for the New Jersey countryside."

He strolled over to the vast pile of rubble and began turning over timbers, Miss Millicent assisting him.

"Ah!" he granted. "Here it is!" He had found the body of an apple-green young lady whose paint was beginning to peel, revealing a healthy pink beneath. With many endearing terms he brought her out of her swoon as Miss Millicent's eye-brows went higher and higher.

Finally she exploded, as the two were cosily settled on a mountainous upholstery-needle that had, at some time, got lost in the sofa.

"Just when, Lieutenant, did you find out that these people weren't invaders from an asteroid?"

Battle raised his eyebrows and kissed the girl. "Have no fear, darling," he said. "A gentleman never—er—kisses—and tells."

PRESENTING MOONSHINE

PRESENTING MOONSHINE by John Collier. Published by The Viking Press, New York. \$2.50.

Here is an anthology of fantasy short stories that is different! And we do mean different! We're used to collections of ghost stories and of weird tales, but "Presenting Moonshine" is definitely one that cannot be classed with any other fantasy collection. These are fantasies in the modern manner, told without Gothic affectations and ghostly trappings; told in a matter-of-fact modern style.

Twenty-four short tales comprise this book, and what happens in them is just about everything. The opener

is about the strange dim people that inhabit department stores at night! Then there's the man who learned the Indian rope trick, climbed the rope and what he found there! And the boy who played with an unseen one named Beeky! And the man who hated women and got a job running the women's section of Hell! And the parrot that laid the odd egg from which hatched a monstrous black chick! And . . . but we could go on like this for a long time. It wouldn't be fair. The best thing to do is advise fantasy connoisseurs to get a copy for themselves. They'll not regret it. M. R. James, H. P. Lovecraft, make way for John Collier!

FANTASY FAN MAGAZINES

COSMIC STORIES acknowledges the receipt of fan magazines from all over and thanks their senders. We are of the opinion that these publications serve a good cause and we are always delighted to see them. . . . One of the most interesting and valuable publications is that of a weekly news-letter designed to carry to avid fans news of their favorite magazines and writers. FANTASY FICTION FIELD (1702 Dehill Road, Brooklyn, N. Y.) is a weekly which we have been following with interest and recommend highly. Neatly mimeographed, it carries the news fast and easily. Its special feature, which alone is worth the nickel a copy, is that each week there is featured a photograph of some future cover to appear weeks later on a newsstand magazine. Julius Unger, collector-dealer, is its publisher. . . . The oldest monthly *s-f* fan magazine is SCIENCE FICTION FAN, whose fiftieth number we have just received. Although occasionally printed, these latest issues are hektographed and have some remarkable many-colored art work in that medium. Each issue contains thoughtful articles on science-fiction which appeal to the mature reader. Collectors find it of interest. Its tireless publisher is Oton F. Wiggins (3214 Champa St., Denver, Col.) . . . The latest title to appear is FANTASIA (269 16th Ave., San Francisco, Cal.), a mimeographed magazine specializing in fantasy. Lou Goldstone has done some fine linoleum-cut illustrations which are on a par with professional art work. Goldstone also contributes an article on the poet George Sterling, worth reading. Another good piece was an analysis of the magazine *Unknown*. Poetry and fiction make up the rest . . . VOICE OF THE IMAGINATION (Box 6475, Met. Sta., Los Angeles, Cal.) is already an institution in science-fiction. It is just one gigantic readers' column featuring nothing but letters, ten to twenty an issue, letters from everywhere, that can and do say

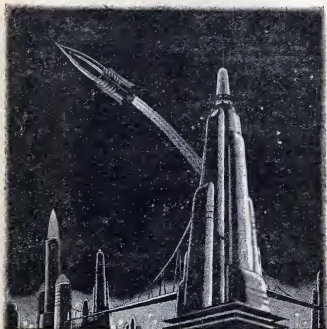
exactly what they please about fantasy. "VoM," as it is known, also delights in featuring tricks in publishing, odd covers, strange type-faces, mod forms of writing Another of Los Angeles' magazine turns up in SHANGRI-LA (1039 W. 39th St., Los Angeles, Cal.). Its material is devoted to the local fans but is of interest nonetheless. The big feature is full page caricatures of leading fantasists by Fritz Zillig. The sketches that fill the magazine are ducky. . . . You've probably seen the art work in our magazines by Roy Hunt. We discovered Hunt in the pages of THE AL-CHEMIST (1258 Race St., Denver, Colo.) of which he is Co-Editor. Hunt does sketches there to illustrate some very fine articles on science-fiction. In this issue R. W. Lowndes writes "Dead End," and C. R. Rothmund speaks of the Burroughs books. A. Merritt's "Rhythm of the Spheres" is being reprinted and Steve Takacs talks about collecting. . . . The Stranger Club of Boston puts out FANFARE (Box 122, Bryantville, Mass.) which is rapidly becoming a leader. At the present time the magazine is promoting a new endeavor to organize fantasy, the National Fantasy Fan Federation. Some heated opinions are exchanged between William Hamling, editor of STARDUST (2609 Argyle, Chicago, Ill.) and Earl Singleton, editor of FANFARE, who thinks the former's magazine is the depth of something-or-other. (Personally, STARDUST, which is a printed magazine striving to be professional, leaves us cold.) Joseph Gilbert's candid column "Sien!-Der" is great stuff. . . . Escaping from England after many months of difficulty comes an issue of GAR-GOYLE (14 Cotswold, Liverpool 7), produced while hiding under a table from air-raiders. The publication manages to keep up its lively, gay spirit wonderfully, and shows no affects from Hitler. Interviews with various British science-fictioners take up most of the magazine and sprightly articles the rest.

Movie Western—Exciting original western fiction illustrated with scenes from current western movies—PLUS inside information about the western stars—PLUS a swift-moving fictionalization of the picture "In Old Cheyenne."

THE REAL THRILL

by James Blish

(Author of "Phoenix Planet," "Callistan Cabal," etc.)



The sign on the obsolete space-petrol ship said "A Real Thrill," but the old rocket-engineer didn't know what a bargain he was getting.

ONE OF THE FEW abilities time had left Martin Burrowes was that of being bored, and he was taking advantage of it to the fullest extent. The incessant, mindless windjamming of the suspiciously blonde girl sounded on beside him and down the cold darkness of the empty street, but he was learning to say "Yes," "You're quite right, m'love," automatically and without interrupting his own stream of thought.

Those thoughts were not particularly happy ones. At the age of 47

Burrowes was hardly a middle-aged man. In these days normal life expectancy exceeded a century, and the middle-age level had been moved up to the vicinity of fifty-five. No, Burrowes had certainly not passed his prime.

But time and technology had betrayed him. Fifteen years ago Martin Burrowes had known all there was to know about rocket engines, and had served as technical adviser to the government, the IP, and a dozen private spaceship yards. Then—the gravity impellor, geotrons, atomic power—and rocket technicians were suddenly as useless in the scheme of things as blacksmiths. "Sorry, Mr. Burrowes." "I'm afraid we have little use for rocket engineering these days, sir." "We realize that a man of your ability—" "We'll call you immediately if anything comes up—"

And now the lunar colonies had revolted; there was war, and industries of all kinds were booming, and there was nothing for Martin Burrowes to do. Even the night clubs and similar places of nonconstructive amusement were folding rapidly in the serious intensity of the war-fever. All the young men and the adaptable older ones were in the IP or the yards, and the ships were in space, fighting or patrolling. Left behind were the crocks which ran on rocket power, and the human crocks who serviced rockets.

The blonde tugged insistently on his arm.

"Mar-tin," she said. "Look. Let's go in there, huh?"

He followed her over-manicured finger to a large sign overlooking the dark street.

STOP

Here and see the former
Interplanetary
POLICE CRUISER
C2-77

Now open to the public.

Admission 50c

A Real Thrill

"That's right," he said, half to himself. "The old IP drydock was down here once."

"Let's go in," she said. "Won't it be fun?"

There might be a melancholy pleasure in seeing the inside of one of the old boats again. Abandoned cruiser, abandoned technician—a fitting juxtaposition.

"Okay," he agreed, and she tugged him toward the sign.

IF THE FENCED-OFF area had ever been a dry-dock, it showed little sign of it now. Most of the heavy machinery had been moved to other quarters and what had been left for useless had rusted into unrecognizable lumps of scrap, amorphous, contorted giants in the darkness. The ship itself lay on hydraulic risers, the kind they had used to repair and scrape the underjets, and a rickety gangplank, lit yellowly by one dismal bare bulb, ran up to the airlock. The beryllium-alloy hull was pitted and burned in a hundred places—sightseers would think them ray scars, but Burrowes recognized them as the ordinary marks of ten times a hundred passages through the atmosphere. He stamped on the boards and a flight lieutenant a little past his own age appeared from the dark interior, blinking sleepily.

"You're the first all day," he said, taking the money. "Come in." He fumbled in the blackness and found a switch, and the corridors lit abruptly.

ly. Bare bulbs again—evidently the C2-77 antedated the general installation of gas-glow tubes.

"This passage," the officer began in a bored voice, "is the core of the ship, running lengthwise from tubes to control-room. The gravity plates, which act similarly to the modern geotron-stasis, are on the hull, so that the down direction in flight is always away from the center—"

"I know," Burrowes interrupted. "I used to service these things. Designed the engines for this type."

"That so?" said the officer, not much interested. "Well, I suppose there's always a job for technicians. Me, I have to hang around this tub and take people through, and everybody else gets on the geotronic ships and gets some excitement."

"Why isn't this one fightin'?" the girl wanted to know.

"Lord," said the officer indulgently. "This thing hasn't seen active service since the Nationalist Coup. Against the Lunies it'd be practically helpless. Those fellows have as good a navy as we have—they ought to—the lunar colonies had a branch of the terrestrial service right in their hands when the rebellion came." He slammed a bulkhead back viciously.

"This is the control room."

"Goodness," said the girl. "It's upside down."

"It wouldn't be in space—remember, *out* is *down* in flight."

Burrowes peered around interestedly, the older days coming back to him as he marked the condition of the apparatus, but the things that attracted him didn't appeal to the girl.

"Goodness," she said again. "What a lot of clock-faces."

"All necessary," the officer nodded, and mistaking the comment for a question, pointed to them one by one.

"Speed in MPS, acceleration in G's, fuel, oxygen, tube heat, surface temperature, outside and inside atmospheric pressure, gravity altimeter, circuit load indicators, detectors of various kinds—"

"Uh-huh," said the girl.

"Main rocket valves, steering rockets, braking rockets," the officer went on relentlessly. "Search beam wheel and switch, starter, screen controls, lights, silencers, wings, wing brakes, generators, landing gear. Compartment release directly above you—"

"Rocket, hold, deck, control," Martin recited without looking, and the bored lieutenant looked at him in surprise. "Yeah, that's right. Waste weight, that release apparatus. Then there's the airlock, emergency lock, autopilot, air, gun controls—"

"Uh-huh," said the girl. "Let's see somethin' else."

The officer shrugged and opened another door.

"Officer's quarters?" asked Burrowes.

"Yep. My little home."

There was little to see but three bunks and a desk upon which lay some dusty books and scattered, yellowed papers. The girl grunted and made for the door, but Burrowes was attracted by the books. He picked them up one by one.

"See this," he said, holding up one marked *Jet Propulsion Engines: Types and Maintenance*. "I wrote this one."

"Yeah?" The officer was more interested. "The captain had a lot of books in here in the days before I took over. He had ambitions for being transferred to a grav-boat, and he studied like fury. See—" He picked up several of the books. "*Mechanics of Achronic Fields*, *Geotron Operation and Repair*, *The Stasis*

Effect. No use for those on a rocket ship."

"True enough," Martin agreed, while the girl squirmed impatiently. "The rest is ordinary enough, though."

"Oh, the usual math tables, Barclay's *Journal*, Government orbits, takeoffs, landings, the *IP Yearbook of Hazards to Navigation* and a million of the monthly supplements to it—every ship carries those, grav-boats included."

"Mar-tin," whined the girl. "Let's see somethin' else."

HE SIGHED and followed the officer out. He shouldn't have come in here. It made him too conscious of the days which should properly be forgotten. The great metal shell seemed empty and dead. So far he had seen no one else on board except the three of them.

"No crew?"

"Skeleton," the officer said over his shoulder. "Don't need many to fly this boat, and it isn't going to be flown, anyhow. A few of the boys are down in the engine compartment playing cards; my engineer is out on one of his periodic binges. I don't blame him," he added bitterly.

They went down the central core to the end of the passage, where another metal door admitted them to a balcony overlooking the engine-room. Below, four burly toughs sat around a circle on the floor, each with a pile of matches before him. Burrowes chuckled slightly to himself as he watched the girl pat her hair and turn on her archest smile. He was more than conscious of his own rather flabby construction, the poor condition into which he had allowed himself to slip with the onset of despair and boredom.

The tube-men barely glanced at

them, however, before going on with their game. Evidently they were used to sight-seers, and had little respect for them. Burrowes ran his eyes over the banks of tubes. They had seen heavy use at one time; they were blue with heat-stain. He pointed.

"If you don't get number two cleaned out pretty soon you'll have a back-blast."

The officer shrugged. "What's the difference? This boat won't see space again. Let the stuff rot. The government's just using it to collect a little petty cash before they melt it up for new ships." A red light began to wink on and off by the door. "Excuse me a minute," he said. "Call coming in. Be right back." He turned and ran back down the corridor.

The girl hung on Burrowes' arm.

"Martin," she said, "let's look around for ourselves, huh? Just a little look around. I'll bet there's a lot of places he hasn't shown us."

Burrowes shook his head. "I don't think we'd better. We might get into trouble. This is still a government ship, you know, and they won't be easy on snoopers."

"Please. Aw, come on, baby—"

"No," he snapped, irritated by the "baby." She let go of his arm.

"Well, I don't care, if you're goin' to be an old spoil-sport—" and she started down a side corridor by herself.

"Hey," he growled, stepping after her. She giggled and ran.

"Come back here, you little witch?" he yelled, but by this time she had vanished around a corner. He stopped, suddenly realizing how quickly he got out of breath these days. Oh, well, let her go. If she got into trouble he'd let her worry her own way out of it.

Returning, he nearly bumped into the officer, who was running back down the core. "Oh," said the latter excitedly. "Oh, it's you. Listen, you and your friend'll have to get off. GHQ called—attack on the north side of the city—we're called in."

"What! You're going to take this tub into the air again?"

"Yeah, yeah—most of the fleet's in a fight over Tycho City—they're hard up for ships, say this may be a decisive battle—where's my rummy engineer?" and he started for the airlock. A light burst in Burrowes' brain, and he grabbed the man's arm.

"Listen. It'll take you valuable time to find your engineer—he might be in any one of fifty dives around this part of town. How about letting me take his place?"

"You're battier'n an asteroid orbit."

"No, listen, I know a lot about rockets—I was an expert, remember. And I can still manage the technical end."

The older man scratched his head. "Well, we've got a pick-up crew as it is—okay. Come on. It may be short but it'll still be action."

In the tube room the men had apparently gotten the news by communicator from the bridge, for there was a ferocious racket of old jets being tuned. Somebody was pounding madly on a breech-valve with a hammer. Martin winced and pounded down the stairs.

"Hey, you," he hollered over the din, grabbing the man. "Don't you know any better'n that?" He snatched a U-wrench and the offending valve opened with a scream of protest. "How far? 63? All right. If you snap those carbopoints inside we'll blow higher than a kite."

"Who the hell are you?" the tubeman growled.

"New engineer," the flight lieutenant's voice cut in. "Get 'em started, boys. We're going to see some fighting." He ran back up the stairs. Martin had an idea he had forgotten something, but in the excitement and sudden din he could not remember what it was. He moved rapidly down the banks, correcting mistakes in adjustment, checking, helping when a recalcitrant old tube refused to yield to persuasion. This was his first experience with actual field-work; before he had been a mere paper-and-drydock man. It was a real thrill.

THE WARNING BELL rang, and he went back on the platform to watch the dials, which duplicated those in the control room. There was even a telescreen whose eyes opened on the forward viewplate, so that the engineer could follow the maneuvering. These old boats had been pretty good in their time, at that. A tube began to sputter and he plunged back down to adjust the mixture.

"Hey, bud, take it easy," the tubeman in charge of that section protested. "I can watch it. You don't have to be the whole damn black gang."

Martin returned to his platform. "Watch your mixtures!" he howled. Then he clung to the railing as the commander flung the ship eagerly upward.

The shock of take-off knocked all the breath from him. He had not known what to expect, for despite many years of lab training, he had never flown in a rocket-powered ship any farther than thirty miles. For a moment he sat stupidly on the platform. Then from somewhere an insistent, wicked pounding came to

his ears, and he shook himself back to consciousness. The banks were glowing dull red now with the over-rapid firing after so many years of inaction, but he couldn't see anything radically wrong. The pounding was coming from that half-clogged number two tube. Well, if the lieutenant took it easy there'd be little trouble there.

He ran his eye over the dials. The lieutenant was taking little account of safety; but then, they would probably come to grief against the first Lunar ship they met, anyhow. Maybe they would be too late as it was. In the screen he could see the partly darkened city and a red flaring on the horizon. The clock grinned at him and he was astonished to see how long they had been traveling. Four minutes. It hadn't seemed like that many seconds. Things moved fast these days, even time. He tried to calm his breathing, but about his rapid heart he could do nothing. Why had he let himself get into such poor physical condition?

There was another jerk of acceleration and the pounding in number two became a continuous rattle, like a machine gun. The engine-room was almost insufferably hot, and the tube-men were stripped to the waist. The communicator buzzed and Burrowes put on the phones.

"We're coming up on it from behind," said the lieutenant's voice. "There's a big Ligget-type battle-plane above it that seems to be directing the Lunies, and I don't think they've seen us. Can we stand more speed?"

Burrowes narrowed his eyes. "A little," he said into the mike. "Feed it slow, or they'll be picking scraps of us up in Florida."

The C2-77 bounced upward like a nudged frog and the number two be-

gan to howl. The tube-men looked nervously at it and then up at Burrowes. They were old enough hands to recognize the signs and the need of expert advice.

And Burrowes knew suddenly that a paper-man couldn't give such advice properly. If that tube back-blashed now—

As if to spur him, the howling rose to a scream. He made a quick decision.

"Clear out," he ordered at the top of his voice. "I'll get it." If it did blow, that way it would take only one man instead of five. He rattled down the stairs, and the black gang, frightened now, headed for the bulkhead as fast as possible.

The screaming of the overloaded, defective tube was a terrifying thing. It seemed to fill the whole universe. He took the U-wrench in a shaking hand, and in a moment the note died away to a low, ominous mutter. He tried to get that out, but an adjustment just a fraction further in the other direction brought the howl in again. He hastily returned the valves to the final position. There were several painful burns on his hands where he had inadvertently touched the white-hot breech, and his heart was making more noise than the jet. Another farther down the bank began to whisper, and when he ran to correct it the number two lifted its voice a little higher.

THEN, SUDDENLY, the girl was behind him, screaming.

"Get me out of here," she yelled, her face hard. "Get me out, do you hear?"

He grinned mercilessly. "Too late, little explorer. We're in the air."

"I don't give a damn where we are. You got me into this and you can get me out."

The number two, its first polite request ignored, demanded attention more loudly. The earphones buzzed. "We're above them," the lieutenant said. "All okay?"

"All wrong," Burrowes told him grimly, pushing away the furious girl. "Listen. That number two jet is going to either burst or backblast any minute. Fall free past your Luny and drop the engine compartment on him and parachute the rest of the way."

"The hell! How about you guys—?"

"The gang's out. There's only me, and I'm satisfied. Make it quick. When the tube goes, the gang and you will go too, besides me."

There was a brief silence, just a second, but age-long. Burrowes' reasoning was inexorable and according to the IP code—one life for many—and he knew it.

"All right," said the lieutenant's voice, strangely altered. "I'll remember you if I get out."

"Thanks, and good luck," Burrowes said, and broke connection. "Now, you," he snapped, and, grabbing the girl, he propelled her toward the bulkhead, clenching his teeth doggedly as she kicked him repeatedly. "Fresh!" she screamed at him, and the double doors of the engine room slammed in her face. The

floor shifted under him, and he recognized the feel of a slanting fall. He knew what would happen—the C2-77 would drive for the nose of the Luny, clearing it as it was relieved of the weight of the engine compartment, and then drop on a 'chute. Behind him number two began to scream again, and he ran to it, swearing.

"If you'll shut your trap for three seconds," he told it, plying the U-wrench frantically. There was a lurch and a snapping sound, and again the floor shifted. The compartment had been cut loose—

That last second, Martin Burrowes felt the burden of uselessness at last lifted completely from his shoulders. At the count of three, he smashed in the back of the valve—

THE GIRL pressed her nose to a tiny port and watched the fused masses of metal tumble past her together, flaring. She did not understand what had happened, but she knew that this had been more of a real thrill than the battered sign had promised. She stood by the engine-room door with her hands on her hips. She was going to give Martin Burrowes a piece of her mind when he came out.

On the other side of the door the air shrieked dismally.

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THE UNUSUAL CASE

by Walter Kubilius

A COSMIC STORIETTE

"THE NEXT will be a really unusual case," Veril promised the visiting judge from Korina, "I think you will enjoy it." "Case number 43!" the guard bawled out. "A man who claims to have traveled in time!"

"Let him enter!" Veril said.

The massive wooden doors swung open and Professor Stimson walked in, followed by an armed guard. He stood for a moment before the five high chairs of the court as his eyes accustomed themselves to the darkness and the flickering lights of the candles.

Meditatively, Veril flicked through the pages of a brief before him. The visiting judge from Korina and the other members of the court looked down with a bored air upon the tattered Stimson.

"According to the record," the chief judge said lazily, "you were found wandering in the gardens yesterday with no passports and no identification papers. Furthermore you made the claim that you had just traveled in time. Have you anything to say concerning the charges?"

Stimson walked up closer to the judge's bench. He did not see the guard in back of him follow.

"I have," he said angrily. "I do not see why I have been jailed and beaten as a common criminal. My name is Professor Stimson and I have just arrived from the year 1941."

"How did you get here?" Veril asked, stifling a yawn.

"By means of the Dissolution-Complex Force which I invented in 1939."

"Oh ho!" Veril said, "Which you invented!"

"Yes."

There was a hurried consultation

between Veril and the visiting judge. They whispered for a moment and then Veril turned and faced Stimson once more.

"Will you tell your story," he said, "from the very beginning, omitting no facts?"

"My full name is Peter Roberts Stimson," the accused said. "I was born April 2, in Albany, New York."

"What country?"

"The United States, of course."

Stimson went on briefly to outline the story of his life and his studies that led to the discovery of the force which would enable him to travel into time.

Fearing that the court might regard him as a hoax and disbelieve the fact that he had come from 2,000 years in the past, Stimson proceeded to give a picture of world history up to the time of his departure during the Second World War. He spoke quickly, outlining the principle events and giving data concerning cities and monuments which would be able to be checked. He brought nothing with him from the past, he said, but he felt that he could be of immeasurable service to the historians of the present who might want to know more about the years before 1941. All he wanted was the right to be free and to study the culture and civilization of the present time.

WHEN HE finished his talk a minute of silence fell upon the judges.

"The usual story," one of the judges yawned.

"Slight variation though," another remarked, "Have you noticed that he places his departure at 1941—whatever that is?"

"Quite true, quite true," Veril admitted, "I've noticed that. But all other symptoms are the same."

"Symptoms?" the time-traveller asked. "What do you mean symptoms? Do you think I am mad?"

"But what beautiful use of mythology and folk lore!" Veril said enthusiastically, "What splendid development of the legend that a country called the United States actually existed! It is even embellished with talk of other countries that existed on the other side of the sea. Although I can't say that I recall such names as Germany, Great Britain and France being used in the folk lore and fairy tales I've read."

Stimson looked bewilderedly from one judge to another.

"Do you mean to say that you don't believe me!" he demanded.

"Have you noticed the fact," Veril said to the visiting judge, ignoring Stimson's panic-stricken face, "that all those who have been seized by this Time-Madness claim to have come from a past more than 1500 years ago? Why not from yesterday? The day before yesterday? Last month? Simply because each madman, however mad, has sense enough to realize that his tale can be disproved by records if he claimed to have come from times of recorded history. Therefore, they make claims to have come in pre-historic times before, and not after, the Great Volcanic Days."

Stimson was amazed and tried to piece together the mystery before him. Was this actually 1941? Perhaps there was a mistake of calculation. Perhaps this was a different Earth. But try as he might he could not hide the knowledge that was growing within him. That the civilization he had known had been destroyed by nature, and that a new one had arisen upon its ashes, ignor-

ant of the history that lay under its feet.

"What is the verdict?" Veril asked.

"Very obvious," one of the judges said.

"All agreed?"

"Agreed."

"Prisoner," Veril said to Stimson, "no society can long endure when its members are insane and unable to become an essential part of that society. You have become obsessed with delusions of scientific grandeur. You are an outcast among us. The verdict is death."

Stimson never knew what struck him. All he felt was the quick clean blade of the guard as it entered his back and pierced his heart. Darkness overcame him as it did when he entered the Time Machine in 1941.

"Will the guards please dispose of the body?" Veril asked.

Two men came and carried the body of Stimson away as the members of the court watched.

"Poor fellow," the visiting judge from Korina mused, "What a terrible hallucination."

"Yes," Veril said, "there have been many cases like this recently. All along the same line. A mad-man suddenly appears and claims that he has come from some ancient time. What can we do? Allow them to stir up the people with insane ideas? We can only do the merciful thing and remove them."

"Was this the unusual case you promised me?"

"No, no," Veril said, "Such cases are quite frequent. The next is the unusual case. We may decide to dissect him."

The court-guard stamped with his spear.

"Case Number 44!" he bawled out. "A man who claims to have come from Mars!"

ANNOUNCEMENT

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THE RED DEATH

COMPLETE NOVEL

by David H. Keller

(Author of "The Conquerors," "The Metal Doom," etc.)

The sole survivor of New York set out through the desolate land to follow the trail of red mushrooms to the murderer of mankind. Dr. Keller's first science fiction novel in many years and one of his best.

CHAPTER I

THE PATIENT lay on a hospital bed.

Around the two were thirty greatest physicians in America.

By his side stood one of the noted specialists. They had come in answer to an invitation which, coming from Dr. Joseph Jacobs, was practically an order. Ten from the United States, five from Canada, five from Mexico and ten from England and France.

Dr. Jacobs, in his lectures and writing, was noted for his simplicity of language. He reached his mental objective as rapidly as possible with the fewest number of words. This lecture, the last he was destined to give, was no exception to his rule.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I am sorry that I had to call you from the work you were doing; but the medical profession of New York City has been faced with a problem we considered too great and too important for us to deal with unless aided by your skill. When I realized this I made a rapid survey of the medical intelligence of many countries, and selected you as being best able to cope with every phase of this problem.

"Briefly stated, the problem is this: Two months ago six young people, three men and three women, spent two weeks in an isolated region of New Brunswick. On returning to New York one of the men became ill, and I was asked to see him. It was impossible for me to make a diagnosis. A week later the other five developed the same symptoms. Realizing the danger of some peculiarly contagious disease, I had the six quarantined, and carefully studied.

"Medical treatment appeared useless, so I yielded to the pressure from my staff brothers and the surgeons, X-ray men, and other types of specialists started a series of what, even they had to confess, were simply experiments. It is sufficient to say that none of the five dead patients died what might be called a natural death. I mean by that simply that in none of the five was the disease allowed to run its definite course till it killed the patient, as the course of the disease was changed by surgery, the administration of powerful drugs and the use of electricity.

"When the second patient died I sent for you, realizing that it would take you some time to answer my call for help. Meantime I advanced an argument, that was powerful enough to secure my request, that at least

one patient be allowed to die a death uncomplicated by treatment.

"This patient, last of three young unmarried men who had gone camping with three women they would have soon married had fate permitted it, is on the bed before us. For two days he has been in a coma. His death can be expected at any moment. He has been in the hospital for three weeks; the history shows that for three weeks before admission, he was not well, being unable to attend to his usual duties because of a peculiar inertia and weakness.

"But, before continuing the discussion of our patient, let me tell you about the other five. They all gave a history of increasing weakness which ended in high temperature and delirium. After two days of almost maniacal excitement, they passed into a stupor in which they remained till their death. With the onset of fever their skin became pink; this color changed rapidly to a red that was peculiarly brilliant and distinctly fluorescent in the dark. About a day before death this color left and at the same time brilliant red tumors, from one to ten in number, appeared on the body. These tumors resembled mushrooms.

"In the other five patients these tumors were treated by every form of medical and surgical method our specialists could think of. They were excised, sprayed with various rays, radium needles of powerful dosage were placed inside of them; they were injected or covered with powerful caustics. I have a complete record of thirty-seven such tumors and the treatment each received. What I am trying to show you is that, at the time of the death of these five persons, not one tumor was in what might be called a normal condition for this particular type of growth.

"The autopsies, carefully performed by our best pathologists, showed the entire body filled with a net-work of fine white fibers, each communicating with, or ending in, one of the external tumors. Microscopic work, so far, has failed to identify these fibers or tumors with any

previous known form of cancer. I am told that the cellular structure is different from anything seen before under the microscope.

"It is needless to tell you that my rapidly growing thought was that here we had a new disease, contracted in Canada, concerning which we know nothing. Allow me to state the symptoms. A few weeks of inertia, then sudden high fever and mania followed by depression and coma. With the fever a pink skin growing rapidly to a luminescent red. Some days before death a growth of red skin tumors.

"The last of these six patients started to develop about two days ago, one of these tumors on his chest. This tumor, due to my insistence, has been untreated in any way. I think that we can look for death at any moment. What I wanted to find out was what this tumor would do when it reached its fullest ripeness.

"The problem facing us is simply this. I believe we have before us a man dying from a disease that is new to science. I also think that it is contagious. I do not know whether the skin or the breath carries the contagion. Nor do I know how early in the disease the patient can give it to others."

AT THIS MOMENT Dr. Jacobs was interrupted by an interne who came into the room and handed him a note. He read it and then turned to his audience.

"One of my young physicians has just informed me that two nurses, an interne, and a colored maid have all become suddenly ill with high fever and delirium. These four were in close contact with our first patient. This may be an answer to one of our questions concerning contagion. But it is not at all clear. Three of these new patients touched the patients many times but the colored maid simply entered the rooms to clean them. If she has contracted the disease, it would seem that the germ can be carried from one person to another through the air.

"But to return to our patient. I will remove the sheet over his chest and you can see the tumor. It rises

from a stem which is about an inch in diameter and firmly attached to the skin. It has a peculiar red color which must be seen to be appreciated. The stem ends in a red ball, about five inches in diameter. This ball, two days ago, was hard. Now, as I touch it, it seems soft and peculiarly dry and fragile.

"Each of you, no doubt to your surprise, was given this morning a gas mask and instructed as to its use. I will ask you all to put them on, and keep them on till you leave this room. I have my finger on the patient's pulse and find that I can no longer feel it beat. There is every evidence that he will be dead in a few minutes. Then we will see what happens to this tumor.

"I must tell you that for several days I have been in close touch with an expert on fungi and toadstools. He has seen this tumor several times with me. His statement is that it resembles a form of toadstool, found in the forest, which when ripe explodes and throws its seed into the surrounding air. I must insist on your putting on your masks instantly."

"Where is your mask, Doctor?" asked a Canadian. "Be honest with us. If this is all as serious as you think it is, why do you not protect yourself?"

"It is unnecessary," Dr. Jacobs answered calmly. "I have been in close touch with all these patients. Last night I developed a temperature of 104. It has been increasingly hard to control myself to finish this talk to you. There has been, even as I talk, an increasing desire to become violent. Put on your masks. I ask it with all sincerity; PUT ON YOUR MASKS!"

Some had done so, others had started, while over half simply sat, incredulous and unbelieving.

"Our patient is dead," announced the Doctor.

He took out his watch. A minute passed, then two and then three.

Suddenly the tumor exploded with a little puff-like noise. A cloud of dark powder covered it, then hid the body and finally filled the entire room.

The light above the bed looked like

a candle burning in a London fog. From the fog came the voice of Dr. Jacobs.

"Gentlemen, I have always said that if the human race is ever destroyed it will be by some force hitherto unknown and undreamed of. It is for you to see that this mushroom that has learned to grow in the human body does not destroy our race."

He started to laugh.

They carried him, fighting and maniacal, from the room.

CHAPTER II

ONE OF the young physicians who had been working with Dr. Jacobs was both brilliant and poor. He had debts to pay and aged parents to support. When he saw Dr. Jacobs carried from the lecture room by visiting physicians with gas masks on, he decided that, in spite of professional ethics, this was an opportunity for him to make some money. He rushed to a pay telephone and got in touch with Thinsell, the flash radio announcer. Would Thinsell give him five thousand dollars for an exclusive bit of news of world interest? Thinsell would not unless he had the news first. The Doctor slammed the receiver down and rushed to the office of a tabloid with two million circulation. There he literally fought his way to the Editor's desk.

"I can tell you a great deal about those deaths in St. Regis Hospital," he whispered to the Editor. "I have seen them all die. Dr. Jacobs is sick now. He has just finished a conference with the thirty specialists he called from all over the world. This is news, man, front page news."

The Editor almost jumped from his chair.

"We have been trying for over a week to get the inside dope on that story, and get it first!" he shouted. "If you have it, really have it, it's worth anything you ask. BUT IT MUST BE TRUE! UNDERSTAND THAT!! How much do you want?"

"Ten thousand. As for it being true, why, I helped care for every one of the six. Now and then the

old man would talk to me about it. I heard him and the botanist talk several times. I sat on a back seat when the old man talked to the visiting physicians an hour ago. I saw the damn thing explode. I tell you I saw it burst."

"What exploded?" asked the puzzled editor.

"The toadstool growing on the man's body. It burst just as Jacobs was afraid it would. The dust filled the entire room. He had gas masks for the visitors but half the damn fools wouldn't put them on. It's a new disease, and unless we learn to stop it, it is going to kill thousands. Jacobs is sick now with the first symptoms. Going to buy the story?"

"Hell, yes!" yelled the editor. He reached for the intercommunicating phone and started to shout into it.

"Stop the presses. Kill everything on the front page. Put this in cannon type. **HUMAN MUSHROOM CLAIMS SIXTH VICTIM.** Hold everything. Send Hogan and Smith to my office. Don't let anyone leave the building till the papers are on the street. Cut the telephone wires. Take no chances of a leak. It's the biggest scoop of the year."

He turned to Hogan and Smith who rushed into the room.

"Listen to this doctor talk. Start writing it. Rush it down to the press. Now, Doctor—Hell! I don't even know your name—tell your story to these two men. Start with the exploding toadstool and go backwards. You tell it and they'll write it. What happened when the bomb exploded? What did Dr. Jacobs do? Why the masks? What is Jacobs' idea?"

For two hours Dr. Youthsins talked. Within thirty minutes the tabloid extra was on the street, to be followed in another hour and in another hour by more extras. At the end of the two hours, the Doctor simply said,

"That is about all. You can send the certified check to my father, Mr. Charles Youthsins, care of the Farmer's Bank." Calmly he placed a thermometer in his mouth and took his temperature.

"Just as I thought," he said. "Temperature 105. If I run true to form I will be raving in a few minutes, smashing things up and all that sort of thing. I guess I am going to be sick and die just like the rest."

He started to laugh hysterically as he went on.

"I told you the old man thought it was highly contagious. Six new cases today that I know of, and that includes Jacobs and myself. More tomorrow, and many more the next day! Perhaps even the editor of a great tabloid and two of his feature writers. Little white roots inside you ripening into a red toadstool, and before you die you will turn a gorgeous red!"

He broke two chairs and gave the editor a black eye before he could be controlled and taken from the room.

The three men left in the room looked at each other.

"Of course that last statement was not true," said Hogan.

"Of course not," agreed the editor. "Perhaps none of it is true. Maybe someday we will have to acknowledge that it was all damn nonsense. But it all sounds true to me, and we were the first to put it into print. I don't know what you boys are going to do, but I am not going home. I have a wife and children there. How long did he say it took to kill a man after he was exposed to it?"

"You aren't turning yellow, Chief?" sneered Smith.

"It isn't yellow I'm afraid of but that red color he was talking about. But is it a scoop or isn't it? Hours ahead of every other paper. That doctor is so crazy that no one will listen to him now, and those visitors will feel it unethical to talk. So we have the news and the other papers can only copy us."

Thinsell, the flash radio announcer, read the first edition of the tabloid containing the cannon ball headline and turned to his secretary.

"I guess I'm growing old, Miss Smith. You can kick me as often as you want to. For five thousand dollars I could have given this news to the world before any city editor ever dreamed of it. Now all I can

do is tell my radio audience about it and—perhaps a word of caution—something to the effect that the truth will only be known when the ethical medical men make a statement."

EVEN AT that early hour a committee of physicians, appointed by the American Medical Association, was trying to compose a message to the public which would relieve their anxiety and at the same time tell the truth. Finally they had a statement for the press which simply stated that there had been some deaths from a new disease, but that all those ill at present with it were quarantined safely and there was no danger of its spreading. They ended the statement by promising a full description of this disease in a forthcoming issue of the Journal of the Association.

Every newspaper in the country printed this report, most of them with editorial comments intended to relieve the readers. But the New York Tatler, the tabloid, placed above the report, in large caps, the simple question:

ARE THEY TELLING THE TRUTH?

For a few days millions of people talked about the new disease. Then a war started in Europe, a heavy-weight champion was battered to bits by a younger man, a prominent politician was found guilty of making false income statements, and most of the people forgot the few days of sensational fear caused by the Tatler's sensational articles.

But more died from the new disease. The quarantined portion of the City Hospital was rapidly being filled with new cases. The medical profession was now forced to admit one thing, even if they did not broadcast it. The disease was highly contagious from the very beginning of the illness of a patient. And that meant that for over five weeks the disease could be spread before the physicians could detect it and isolate the patient.

Under such circumstances quarantine was useless!

And statistics, carefully kept, showed thirty patients still alive and

twenty-seven dead. No treatment had been of any value. Once a man or woman started with high fever, mania, and pink skin, he or she passed on to certain death.

It is to the credit of the medical and nursing professions that every patient was skillfully cared for. Knowing the danger there was never a lack of volunteer nurses. Physicians, famous and wealthy, came to New York and begged for a chance to help study the disease, even if it meant intimate contact with a disease against which there appeared to be no defense. Dr. Jacobs had died, but his spirit remained alive in the hearts of thousands of brave physicians and nurses. And the press assisted in hopeful editorials urging the readers to remain calm and rely on their physicians.

Even the New York Tatler joined in this campaign of hope. They continued to print the news but cut out the sensational element. But, in spite of the press, the thing that the medical profession dreaded began to happen. Thousands and tens of thousands of New Yorkers deserted the city. Quietly, without saying very much about their plans they began to scatter over the nation—anywhere to get away from their fear.

Many of these wanderers were already sick and contagious.

THE COLORED maid, who had been one of the early victims of the Red Death, had infected a number of her associates long before her quarantine and death. As the days passed an increasing number of dwellers in Harlem became ill. At first they were diagnosed by physicians and placed in quarantine. Then a Prophet rose in Harlem and gave a new message to his people. It was simply this,

"God is good. God is great! God is all powerful!! Science has failed. Physicians are worthless. Only God can save us. From now on we must trust in Him. From now on if one of you becomes sick let the true believers gather around the bed and pray to God for his recovery. Let the faithful lay heal-

ing hands on his body and pray for his soul.

"God is good.

"God is great!

"God is the true physician who can heal us!"

It was a simple message that could be easily understood. It carried hope, a definite sense of security. To antagonize this faith was to shatter the foundations of an ageless belief in the omnipotence of God. The medical profession made a dignified protest, the press wrote editorials against the message and showed its dangers, the health department threatened the Prophet with arrest.

But the people believed!

The colored people became sick; they died surrounded by their praying families and neighbors. Healing hands were laid on them, songs were sung and prayers offered, but at the appointed time they died, in the same way hundreds were now dying in the city hospitals.

But for two months these people believed the Message.

In the meantime these believers continued their work. They cooked and cleaned and labored for the white people. In clubs, restaurants, private homes, kitchens and elevators, they believed and kept on working, constantly spreading the faith and the new disease.

The thirty specialists had died; other physicians, nurses and orderlies had died; hundreds from every walk of life had died in hospital, home and garret. And then the nation awoke to the danger. The President called a special session of Congress to take any action advised by the American Medical Association. The first bill passed was one quarantining the entire New York metropolitan area. Workers, physicians or nurses could enter but none could leave this area.

Efforts were made to keep this action a secret till it was signed by the President and preparations made to enforce it. But something of such magnitude could not be kept a secret. The news spread and with it an exodus of hundreds of thousands

started from the city. By automobile, airplane, trains, boats and on foot the frightened citizens left.

But finally the act became law and troops were thrown around the city blocking every artery of travel. It was done so quickly that every tunnel, every bridge was congested with automobiles which could neither go forward nor backward. It was the beginning of a panic unequalled in the history of mankind.

CHAPTER III

IT IS estimated that at the time the city was quarantined, approximately three million people were confined there. They had to be fed and cared for. They could not be brutally neglected. Physicians continued to volunteer their services. The national Red Cross sent all available nurses. Food was sent in by the trainload. The people were assured that they would be provided for in every way.

In the city there was a complete breakdown of every social law. Those who could do so, isolated themselves in their homes and nailed their doors shut. Theaters, restaurants, and every place of amusement were closed. Only the churches remained open, and these were filled with desperate throngs of people who were hopelessly returning to a faith they secretly failed to have.

All the hospitals were filled with sick and dying. The large hotels were filled. At last there was nothing to do except to keep the sick in their own homes. Early it was recognized that it was impossible to bury the dead and they were cremated by thousands in large fires built in every park. But soon deaths occurred in such numbers that there were not enough well persons to gather and burn the dead bodies. Sick people went to bed, died in bed and were left in bed.

Thus the city, once the pride of the nation, became a silent tomb; but, before dying, it infected the entire nation with the deadly terror. Like Sampson, in dying, it pulled down the pillars of national life.

Over four million New Yorkers were out of the city when the quarantine became effective. Many of them were sick. Each patient became a center for a new outbreak of the disease. The realization of this gripped the entire nation in fear that rapidly rose to panic.

The history of the death of New York City can never be fully told because only one man survived to tell it, Thinsell, the radio commentator. It was rather peculiar that he was the one selected by Fate to live on while all around him were dying. Early in the history of the Red Death he realized the possibility of the breakdown of the electrical power plants, so he supplied himself with a short wave set powered with batteries. Hour by hour, he spoke to the waiting nation, keeping them informed of the twisting torture of the dying Metropolis. He tried to keep calm, to state only facts. Constantly he remained hopelessly hopeful. He visited the hospital, fearlessly exposed himself to infection, and finally realized that he was immune to the menace, and might survive to secure lasting renown as a reporter. His daily messages, carefully copied, remain a lasting monument to his skill as a gatherer of news. Among them were the following.

FLASH.

I have just called on a group of laboratory workers who are trying to find and use an antitoxin that will protect against the Red Death, now scientifically named Jacobs' disease, after the hero who first recognized its danger. So far these workers have died without finding any solution to their problem. The places of the dead scientists have been fearlessly taken by new volunteers. This debacle has at least shown the wonderful heroism of the medical profession whose members have given their lives in the hope that others may live.

FLASH.

I have just returned from Central Park. Trees have been torn down, apartment-houses stripped of their wood to keep the crematory fires burn-

ing. City trucks are constantly arriving with their loads of dead. But I fear that it will soon end. Many of the workers are sick and the supply of truck drivers is rapidly failing. From the fires comes a peculiar odor which seems to nauseate those near it. It is disagreeable to me but does not make me sick.

FLASH.

Today I passed a dying man. He was lying almost naked in the street. Growing from his left cheek was the red toadstool now so well known. I stood watching him and as I did so the tumor exploded and covered his body with a fine dark dust. The early descriptions of this occurrence, as published in the New York Tatler, were absolutely correct, in spite of their seemingly sensational impossibility. I went towards the dust and deliberately breathed it, wishing to assure myself that I am immune to the disease.

FLASH.

Medical care of the sick has completely broken down. Physicians and nurses are dying as fast as their patients. I walked through the City Hospital today and saw hundreds uncared for and dying from starvation as well as from disease. I consider it useless to send any more volunteers into the city. It does no good and only adds to the deaths.

FLASH.

Today I persuaded Dr. Thornton, Canadian volunteer, just arrived in New York, to take a pint of my blood and inject it into his body. If I am immune perhaps my blood can convey that immunity to others. In due time I will report the results of this experiment.

FLASH.

One of the things I am slowly learning to face is the peculiarly brilliant face of those with fever. They walk around the streets in their hopeless mania with faces red as though painted with carmine. As long as their bodies retain this red color they live. When it fades into ash gray the toadstool starts growing and death can be expected in a few days.

FLASH.

The food problem is increasing. Trains of food continue to arrive but distribution is at a standstill. Hundreds gather around the yards, breaking open cars and helping themselves to the food, but thousands are starving. I advise that no more food be sent to us. If the deaths continue there will soon be no one to feed except myself.

FLASH.

Today I wandered through an apartment house that once had sheltered the rich of this city. I thought it was empty, but a slight moan caused me to open a bedroom door. A woman was on the bed. Alone, without benefit of physician or nurse, she had just given birth to a child. Her scarlet red face told that she was doomed. She asked me to take the baby and care for it. I promised her I would do so. Who would have thought that the flash radio announcer, Thinsell, would become the adopted father of a baby? I have talked to Dr. Thornton about it. He tells me that every child so far born since the quarantine has died from the red terror. I have asked him to give the child several ounces of my blood.

FLASH.

Thornton, the baby and myself spent the night together. It has been ten days since he injected into his body my blood. I have asked him to take some more. The baby is doing well. The red terror seems to be ending in New York. It is a fire that is dying because it has no more fuel to feed on.

FLASH.

As I have repeatedly stated in these flashes this epidemic has shown the heroism of parts of the human race. Today I was walking along the Hudson when I saw someone swimming towards the shore. I waited till the woman, for it was a woman, came out of the water. We introduced ourselves. She was Miss Susan Crabtree, a graduate nurse from Ohio. She entered the city by this means when she found all other portals of entry closed. I showed her that the best thing she could do was to take care of Rose, my baby. Thornton has given her a pint

of my blood. I hope it serves the purpose.

FLASH.

Today Thornton and I made a hasty survey of the city. We covered considerable territory, as we found some bicyclee. During that time we saw no signs of life except trees and flowers and packs of dogs; already reverting to savage traits they are feeding on the only food they could find which is best not to talk about.

FLASH.

Six weeks have passed since Thornton took the first injection of my blood. It seems that he is going to escape death. It is too early to tell whether we can in a similar manner protect Miss Crabtree and the baby Rose. So far they are doing very well. We have decided not to leave the city till we are sure none of us are contagious, though it seems from the reports I have been receiving that this is a matter of little importance. We are comfortable and, by diligent scouting, have found ample food supplies.

FLASH.

The unburied bodies of the dead used to worry me. I find now that if nothing is done to them they rapidly dry till nothing is left save dusty bones covered with skin. The parasitic plant seems to drain them of all moisture in the process of throwing out its flowering growth. The last rain storm seems in some way to have swept the city clean. All the fires are out in the parks. The air is fresh. It is good to be alive.

These are but a few of the hundreds of radio messages Thinsell sent during those weeks in the damned city of the Dead. It was his golden opportunity to become, for all time, one of the greatest of all reporters. The time finally came when he told the world:—

FLASH.

This is my last radio message. We are satisfied that the four of us are completely protected against the red terror and, our work here being over, we are going to leave the city. Due

to the loving care of Miss Crabtree, Baby Rose is very well. We have found a row boat and tomorrow morning we are going to go west across the Hudson. We have made no definite plans, as for some days we have had no messages from the rest of the world. Meantime I send orchids to all the brave men and women who came to this city in an effort to serve humanity.

CHAPTER IV

AT THE TIME Dr. Jacobs delivered his historical address to the thirty visiting physicians, the United States was, in spite of unemployment, depression, and an unbalanced budget, the richest nation in the world. It had more automobiles, more radios, more dollars in the bank per hundred population, than any other nation. About ten million persons were unemployed, but there was no starvation.

When the four survivors left New York the entire social and economic life of the nation had completely broken down. Every large city, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans, Detroit, Salt Lake, Denver, San Francisco and Los Angeles had passed through the deadly experience of the Metropolis. All small cities, even towns of a few thousand, were dead or dying. Fugitives from New York had carried the infection to every part of the nation. The country around each city had tried to protect itself by armed quarantine only to become infected finally. Once the disease appeared in any center of population, the city people fled to the country, infecting all with whom they came in contact. Finally, small groups of farmers formed little communities, closely guarded, and deliberately shot any stranger who came near them.

Communication broke down except for the short wave enthusiasts. They talked to each other till death came. There were no more mails, no telephone service; the tracks were empty of trains, the cement roads free of automobiles. Life reverted to the primitive. Government as a national

ruling power ceased to exist. Each little isolated group of farmers became a law unto itself. Prisons still had walls but all the convicts were dead. The insane, epileptic, the mentally deficient, had all been cured by the tender hand of death. Statistics, at such a time, are absolutely unreliable but it seems likely that not more than one out of every fifty thousand survived this beginning of the red terror.

The first wave of horror-stricken emigrants carried the disease to the rest of North America and to Europe. In their turn London, Berlin, Leningrad and Paris followed the fate of New York. Rapidly the cities were destroyed; more slowly the flame burned through the country. The shepherd died with his flock, the French peasant amid his vineyards, the fisherman in his boat. Caravans carried the plague to the faraway places of the earth. Mecca became a city of the dead. Asia felt the sting. China, densely populated, died quickly, with a grim satisfaction that Japan was also doomed. The far off islands of the Pacific, visited semi-yearly by trading vessels, wondered why no more sails appeared on the horizon. Life on the earth burned out as though the planet had been a ball cast into flames of Hell.

For once there was land and wealth enough to satisfy the few living. No one talked of future wars; none coveted the possessions of his neighbor. All he asked of those near him was that they stay as far away from him as possible. The few left alive, and there were some who escaped, fell into a depression that was, perhaps, worse than actual death. All wondered what was going to happen next and few had the initiative to direct the course of future events.

To the few survivors in the United States much of this could only be a matter of guessing. Communications between nations and continents rapidly broke down, as intercity communication had in the United States. Perhaps some day a bold explorer will encircle the globe and learn all details available from the little cen-

ters of life that still remain. But the above is what happened according to Thinsell's vivid, and no doubt correct, imagination. He talked along these lines to Dr. Thornton and Miss Crabtree as they crossed the Hudson River.

"We will find ourself in a new world," he continued. "A world which we can only dream of till our travel shows us what actually has happened to it. We cannot tell what we will encounter, but I am sure of one thing and that is simply this: Those who are still alive will have a constantly present fear of all strangers. They are alive because they have been isolated from all travelers. They trust no one. I think they will shoot first and talk afterwards. Perhaps we may find a little group of educated people who will accept us after we give them our credentials but that is a very slim chance. It would be extremely irritating and annoying to me, after all I have been through, to be shot by some farmer who can hardly read and write. It may even be difficult to feed ourselves, to say nothing of providing the milk necessary every day for Baby Rose. Of course there are still cows but she will starve if she has to depend on me to milk them."

"I, at least, know how to milk a cow," announced Miss Crabtree. "I was raised on a farm. It might be worth while to find a cow or a goat and take it with us. After all, we cannot let Rose suffer. Something makes me feel that she is going to be a rather rare thing in this new world."

"It is a new world," declared Dr. Thornton. "A world cleaned suddenly of all its problems and worries. In a way, it's a wonderful thing to be alive in it! Thinsell, have you any idea how all this started? I know the story of the six young people who went to New Brunswick, but why did it have to happen to them rather than to thousands of other vacationists?"

"I don't believe that it just happened," was Thinsell's answer. "Man and mushroom have lived together for some millions of years. If it just

happened, why not before this time? I have my own idea about it, but just now we have more important things to do—"

"I should say so," interrupted Miss Crabtree. "It may interest you self-ish men to know that I have exactly one dozen small cans of condensed milk for Baby Rose. You men simply have to find a cow or a goat. You may have little or no paternal feeling for her, but she's my responsibility and I am not going to see her starve, after all the poor thing has been through. Look! There's an airplane!! Who could it be?"

"It's flying lower," cried Thornton. "He is dropping pieces of paper. Maybe messages."

The two men ran over the field and were back in a few minutes.

"News!" they shouted, as they grabbed a blanket and waved it in the air. "The men in the plane have been hunting for us."

"Well," exclaimed Miss Crabtree. "When do I get that cow?"

THE PLANE slowly circled and came to a beautiful landing a few hundred feet away. A man jumped out. Another man handed him an animal and then a smaller one, and then the man left the plane. The two started to walk towards Thinsell and his party. First walked, then ran.

"Are you Thinsell?" the man shouted.

"None other!" the flash reporter shouted across the diminishing space between them.

The two parties met.

"I am Blake, formerly of Kansas City," announced the man, "and this is my wife, Caroline. We received your last short wave message announcing you were leaving New York and our group decided that we should get in touch with you before it was too late. Rather dangerous, you know, to wander around this world and call on people unannounced. They shoot first and talk afterwards. We knew you would have to have fresh milk for the baby and so we brought a goat and her kid with us."

"That relieves me," sighed Miss

Crabtree. "I am glad to find out that one man in the world realizes that a baby has to be fed."

"You can give my wife all the credit," answered the man with a laugh. "But let me tell you we have all been interested in that baby. Your daily news about her has been mighty interesting."

"Glad to hear that," said Thinsell. "Now I suppose you can guess who the rest of my party are, if you have been receiving my flashes." This gentleman is Dr. Thornton, from Canada; the lady is Miss Susan Crabtree, the adopted mother of the adopted baby Rose."

Mrs. Blake chuckled the baby under the chin. "Look at her smile at me. Miss Crabtree, our women are going to make it rather hard for you to keep this little one to yourself."

"Are babies such a rare happening nowadays?" asked the nurse.

"Shouldn't be," Blake answered for his wife. "But it's just a part of the fear. Our women thought it would be bad enough for the older people to die, and decided that they would not deliberately expose any little ones to the red terror, though goodness knows all we know about it is what we read for a few days in the papers. Of course we have received all of Mr. Thinsell's radio talks. Sorry we could not talk to you, old man, but something went wrong with our machine and we couldn't send any messages."

"Suppose you tell us all about your side of the world," suggested Thinsell. "Isolated in New York we could only guess as to what was happening outside."

"How about feeding Rose some goat milk," suggested Miss Crabtree. The two women walked over to the plane where the mother and her kid were contentedly feeding, one on grass and the other milk.

"The story of our colony is rather simple and yet I feel that in some respects it is rather unusual. It is probably the only prearranged colony in the world, though no doubt there are many other little colonies, organized by necessity and not planned for like ours.

"It all started because a man in

Kansas City by the name of Manson had imagination. Peculiar chap, never worked much, never had to, so he specialized in imagination. When he read the first articles about the red death in the New York Tatler, he put that hobby of his to work, and within twenty-four hours asked ten of us and our wives to join him in a private conference. He told us that, if Dr. Jacobs was right, the new disease would sweep over the world like a gigantic tidal wave. It was his idea that something had to be done to prepare for a new civilization, retaining all that was possible of the old culture. His argument was so convincing that we all agreed to join him in the formation of an isolated colony. We raised all the cash we could and in three days left Kansas City, some driving trucks loaded with the things we thought would be necessary. The rest of our party traveled in automobiles; Mrs. Blake and I used our airplane.

"Our destination was Bay St. Pierre on the north shore of the Gaspé Peninsula. Manson had been there and thought it was an ideal location, isolated and easy to defend if the need arose. We arrived there as tourists. Of course we had to pay a heavy duty but that was the easiest part. The hard part was to induce the owners of the land to sell it to us. But ready cash looked good to most of them. We hired three families to stay with us. We could not close the shore road at first but we could keep people from stopping or staying with us. When the crash came we barricaded the roads, finally blocking them with dynamite.

"We have been living there ever since. It did not take us long to see that Manson was correct in his imagination, and when we started to receive your messages we were thanking God that he had that imagination. So there in Gaspé we have ten young men from Kansas City and their wives, and three French Canadian families. We raise cattle, make butter, have pigs and chickens, cut wood and fish. In some ways it is not very exciting but at least we are alive. We wanted you to join us, and that is why I am here."

"**T**HAT is some story," said Thinsell, with a rather sad smile. "In the old days it would have been headline news for any paper. But I presume there are no papers any more."

"You are wrong there," corrected Blake. "Every week we issue a typed edition of The St. Pierre Times. Three copies, one original and two carbons. Your arrival will be real news, Mr. Thinsell."

"I am not going with you," the radio artist announced definitely. "I want you to take Dr. Thornton, Miss Crabtree and Rose. I am going back to the city. There is some work for me to do there."

"You can't go back there alone!" declared Dr. Thornton.

"Maybe I can't but I am. Here is the reason. Six young people go to New Brunswick. They contract a disease there, return to the city, spread the disease, die, and in this way destroy most of the human race. Accident? I have always doubted it. I have been wondering about it for a long time. So I am going to return to the city, find out if I can just where those first victims of the red death lived, who their friends were, try and find some letters or a journal kept by one of them. Somewhere I may find just where they camped in New Brunswick, who their guide was, the people they met and what they did. In all this there may be a slight clue as to just how they became sick. I want to know the *why* of it all. That will be real *flash* news for any radio reporter."

"What do you think of it, Dr. Thornton," asked Blake.

"Seems like a waste of time to me, but I will tell you one thing. There is no use arguing with Thinsell. I have tried it several times and never have won. If he says he wants to do this masterly piece of detective work, the only thing to do is to let him do it. I don't like the idea of his going back alone but I suppose there is no other way. There is another reason why I should go with you to Gaspé. Miss Crabtree thinks that baby Rose should have an adopted father, and she has selected me. You men know how determined

a woman can be when she makes up her mind to anything and the young woman seems to think that the baby just has to have a father."

"That is *real* flash news!" shouted Thinsell. "I don't know when I have heard anything that has pleased me more."

"Glad of that," said the Canadian doctor. "I was afraid you might have had some similar ideas about Susan."

"None at all. Miss Crabtree is a lovely woman, and I am very fond of her, but I am satisfied to be the adopted Uncle of Baby Rose. Rose certainly needs a father. But perhaps you adventurers in love had better start back to Gaspé. Give the home folks my best regards and I will be seeing you some day."

He helped load them into the plane and stood there alone as the plane shot airward. The last they saw of him for some months was his figure waving farewell to them.

"And now to get to work. It looks like a real man's job. Alone in the city of the Dead! No doctor friend, no little baby, and no charming nurse to keep me company. At least I saved the three from certain death. They belong to me. This job is not going to be an easy one but at least it may end in satisfaction. A new civilization will rise in this world and they will want to know *why* the old culture passed away. The books of the future will teach that Dr. Jacobs gave the warning and Thinsell, the flash reporter, gave the explanation. That should be glory enough for any man."

He shoved his boat out into the river and slowly rowed across the Hudson towards the silent metropolis.

CHAPTER V

THINSELL returned to his apartment, arranged his scanty supply of canned goods, ate supper, and tried to go to sleep. All the next day he foraged through shops and apartments hunting more food. All of the stores had been looted but slowly he found things to eat, a can of tomato juice here, cornbeef and sardines there. By the end of the day he had found and taken to his apartment enough to



keep him alive for at least a month. He realized that he would have to go to the river for water, and decided it would be best to drink ginger ale, of which he had found several cases.

On the second day he went to the city hospital and started looking through the records for the case histories of the six young people who had vacationed in New Brunswick. He finally found them and carefully copied all of the family history, and names and addresses of the nearest relatives. This took him some time. After that he visited the apartments where the six lived and carefully began what seemed to be an endless search for some scrap of paper that would tell him just where in New Brunswick the six had spent the two weeks. He found some postal cards, postmarked "St. John's, N. B." with casual messages on them. "Having

a good time. Wish you were with us." "Went fishing today. Lots of trout."

He found a few letters but they told him nothing. When he finally finished with his search of the apartment he had to admit that all he knew was that the young people had camped in New Brunswick, had a good time and caught some trout.

It seemed reasonable to believe that the six had written to others besides their families. They must have had friends but who? And then he suddenly remembered that he had flashed the announcement of the engagement of two of the six, and had had a had half hour with a young lady who said she was a friend of the debutante involved. That made him almost run to his old office. A frantic search through his old notes and there it was. The indignant lady

was Miss Caroline Young. Easy enough to secure her address in the old telephone directory. Easy enough to find her empty home. Not so easy to enter, but a door can be broken down with a fire ax.

He found the young lady's bedroom. There he started a careful search and located one letter. He read it carefully.

"My dear Caroline,

I wish I had time to tell you all the news, but I have to hurry because the boy that mails our letters for us is in a hurry to start. We have been having a perfectly lovely time. John had a bad headache but the guide had some capsules and two of them put the dear boy on his feet again.

Am taking a lot of pictures and will have them developed at Smith's as soon as I return, and give you a complete set. I hope the ones of our guide turn out well. He is a fine old man, by the name of John Johnson. To hear him talk you would think he had been everywhere and done everything. Yesterday he showed us the scars on his back received the time he killed a bear with his hunting knife. Hard to believe but there is the evidence.

Lots of love.

Will be seeing you soon.

Agnes.

"There is something worth while," mused Thinsell to himself. "Her sweetheart, John, was the first of the six to die. That means that he was the first one infected. And there are pictures of the guide and he had scars on his back. Now where are those pictures? Perhaps at Smith's photography. Smith!! No doubt several thousand of them in the telephone book."

He was correct. Exactly twenty-three Smiths who were photographers. That meant a careful elimination, but he at once realized that some lived in Brooklyn and some in Harlem and some in the Bronx.

The natural thing, Thinsell reasoned, was for Agnes to take them to the shop around the corner. He found the place and, after some hours of searching, located the envelope with the films and a double set of pictures. Pictures finished and never called for, because the young woman

had become ill and died, before she had time even to think about calling for them. They were good pictures, especially the ones of the old guide.

"This winds up the New York end of this investigation," said Thinsell. "No doubt it will turn out to be the easiest part of it. And now to find the guide if he is alive. He may be dead or, if living, several hundreds of miles away from the place the seven of them camped over a year ago. Of course if I find him it will be easy to identify him since I have some of his pictures, and then there are the scars. He must be a big man, and his beard shows that he is rather old. If he is living I have to find him. He gave two capsules to Agnes' fiancee. What was in those capsules? Is there any connection between them and the red death?"

THINSELL went to New Brunswick in an automobile he found in a garage in the Bronx. It was a new car, a Dodge. Thinsell knew nothing concerning the mechanism of the car but he knew how to drive one. For a few days he was busy filling every available space with cans of gasoline, oil and food. Then he started his journey. Several times he had to stop and clear the road of smashed wrecks. When the people left the big cities they had observed no speed laws. On the way he saw few signs of human life, though cattle, already growing wild, were plentiful, and he saw several packs of dogs reverting rapidly to savagery.

Through sheer curiosity he drove through Boston and Portsmouth. In his carefully kept diary he stated that he drove over seven hundred miles without seeing a man or a woman. Twice he saw little groups of houses on hills, smoke coming from the chimneys, but they were surrounded by high barbed wire fences and, having no reason for doing so, he did not stop to investigate the colonies.

At last he came to St. Johns in New Brunswick. Like all other centers of population it was a dead, deserted city, with grass already growing in the cracked cement streets.

By this time he had developed a

habit of talking to himself. He called it thinking out loud.

"These six young people must have come here, and engaged a guide. They, perhaps, engaged him by letter before they left New York. Now just how would they know who to write to? That is a good point. They wrote to the Chamber of Commerce, and the Chamber sent them a list of guides, and from that list they selected this man John Johnson. The best thing to do would be to eat and then visit the Chamber of Commerce and look over their advertising literature."

He had better luck than he could have hoped for. In the deserted office he found an abundance of advertising matter, which included a list of official guides, their post-office address, their rates and their specialties. This list included Johnson and there was only one guide by that name.

"At least," sighed Thinsell, "I know where he got his mail."

The next day he drove one hundred and fifty miles more and came to the end of the old civilization. He stopped his car in front of the Post-Office of St. Stephens, a town of not more than a dozen houses. Nobody was home. He went behind the door of the post-office and looked over the mail. Nothing for Johnson in the J general delivery box. What was there for him to do next?

CHAPTER VI

THINSELL spent the next two days making a careful study of the little town of St. Stephens. He visited and examined all of the houses and walked over the little farms. As far as he could see, the people had simply left their homes, driven by fear of the new disease. They had taken very little with them. In one home the wash was still waving rather tattered on the rope line in the back yard. An outdoor oven had bread in it. Beds were unmade; children's toys were scattered on the floors.

"The place," Thinsell thought, "reminds me of a ship in perfect condition, found drifting on the ocean,

abandoned for some unknown reason by its crew and passengers. The people simply went away and never came back, and the reason for that is simple. They are all dead. What happened to Johnson? Did he go with them? What would an old guide do under such circumstances. The most probable thing is that he would go out into the woods, and stay there. Perhaps he was in the woods when the people left. He may not know anything about the new disease. There may be hundreds of isolated people who have not yet heard of what happened to the world. If he is in the woods, far away from civilization, he may be alive. *But some day he will come back.* He will need flour and coffee and salt and ammunition. It is hard to do but it seems the only thing is to stay right here and wait for him."

He started to talk aloud,

"Now is the time for you to write your story of the death of New York City, Mr. Thinsell. You are the only one who can write it in its entirety. Stop your flash stuff and begin writing real literature. Eight hours a day for sleep; eight hours a day to gather wood and food and prepare for the winter, and eight hours a day writing. I wonder how much paper I can find in the store. No doubt about there being pens and ink there. And now all there will be for me to do will be to work and wait and write."

He selected the late storekeeper's desk as the best place to write. It was pleasurable at first. At the end of two weeks he became restless. It was hard to talk to no one but himself and the dogs and cats that rapidly adopted him as their master. He was not sure that he was doing the wise thing in waiting.

His dogs began barking furiously. Going to the door, he saw a woman come walking down the street. As she neared the store he saw that she was a young woman, and pretty.

She came near and then hesitated as she called,

"Where is everybody? And who are you?"

"I don't know where anybody is," Thinsell replied. "I came here and de-

cided to stay for a while. My name is Thinsell. Can I do anything for you? And who are you, anyway?"

The girl came over to the store and sat down wearily on the wooden steps.

"I am Jean Johnson," she replied, "My grandfather, John Johnson, and I live out in the woods, about seventy miles from here. Grandfather fell and hurt his back a long time ago. He has not been able to walk since. We needed supplies for the winter and so I made him as comfortable as I could and came for them. We always trade here. Where have the people gone, and where is the store keeper?"

"I told you I do not know," Thinsell said kindly, restraining his excitement. "There has been no one here for two weeks except myself. I am sure it would be all right for you to take anything you want that you need for the winter. You could leave a record of what you take if you want to. So your grandfather is John Johnson? Is he a guide and bear hunter?"

"He used to be before he hurt his back. I think he was the best guide in New Brunswick. And he has killed a lot of bears; even killed one with a hunting knife, though the bear clawed his back plenty before he died."

Thinsell gave a sigh of relief. Things were happening far better than he had a right to expect.

"I tell you what I am going to do, Miss Johnson. You pick out all the supplies you need. Gather together all the two of us can carry. I suppose there is no road?"

"There is a wood road for the first thirty miles."

"Good. We will load my car full of supplies and take it as far as we can. Before winter starts we can carry it to your home, even though it takes a lot of walking. You eat something and then go to sleep. You look as though you needed rest. Fantastic things have been happening, as I'll explain. In two days, I will have you back to your home—unless the car breaks down. You take care of your grandfather and I will carry the supplies in to you. I never did anything like that before but I suppose

it will do me good to work hard for once in my life. Now you eat and sleep and rest. And tomorrow we will start. Give me a list of what you need and I will start loading the car. I think there is gasoline enough to make the distance even on low."

Jean thanked him and went into one of the little houses.

"And that is that," said Thinsell. "Johnson the bear hunter disappeared because he had to. Neither he nor the girl know anything about the red death. This is the first time she has been here for many months. Now we will see what Johnson knows about those six young people he guided for two weeks—and the capsules he gave to the man who was the first to become sick."

THINSELL worked till late that night collecting stores and loading the automobile. They started soon after sunrise. The radio reporter considered that he was an expert driver, but he did not know that such roads existed. He had a flat, used his spare; had another flat and decided to go on. All his tires were ruined and he was running on metal for the last five miles; but he finally came to the end of the road. Jean congratulated him.

"You did better than I thought you could. Now there is fifteen more miles to walk and the rest is by canoe on a lake. Shall we carry some things, and will you go with me?"

"I think it would be better for me to stay here. If you go by yourself you can travel faster. The old man may need you. I have a revolver and I will stay with the food. If you can come back tomorrow, we will start moving things."

"I don't like to think of your staying alone all night," said Jean. "You, being a city bred man, will not be used to it."

"Be a good experience for me," the man said with a laugh. "I don't promise to kill any bears with a hunting knife, but I can keep the raccoons away from the bacon. So travel on and I will be waiting for you here tomorrow."

He felt lonely after the girl left.

"She is lovely," he whispered. "I

only hope that her grandfather does not turn out to be the villain in this play. Even if he does, it is not her fault. After seeing her I doubt that Johnson had anything to do with it, at least knowingly. He has killed in his lifetime but he is not a killer, not a man who would deliberately plan the slaughter of the human race."

It took four days of hard work for Jean and Thinsell to carry the food from the automobile to Johnson's three room cabin. For some reason, which, the man acknowledged, was hard to explain, he did not want to meet the old bear hunter till this work was completed. Unused as he was to hard work, he ended each day completely tired. Finally the automobile was empty, and the last sack of flour and last slab of bacon safely delivered and put away for the winter. Then and only then, after shaving, and dressing as neatly as he could, Thinsell entered the old man's bedroom.

The bear hunter looked at him critically, as he said,

"Pleased to meet you. Thanks for being so kind to little Jean. Since I was hurt she has had a hard, lonely time of it. But she told me that you were a young man and your hair is as white as mine."

Thinsell laughed.

"Mine used to be black, but during the last year it turned white. Guess it was the life I lived and the things I saw. And I really am not so very young at that. I am glad that I could help the two of you. Jean would have had a rough time of it had I not been at St. Stephens, but I was there and you two have lots of food for the winter. How do you feel?"

"What do you think? All my life I have done anything I wanted to do and now I do only what I can and that is very little. Do you know anything about medicine? I thought I would get better; always have, no matter what happened to me, but I think that this is my last journey. Know anything about the woods I am going to live in? Any bears there?"

"You are going to improve. You

have to. Lots of work for you to do. Campers to guide and bears to kill."

"No. Not this time. But where did you come from, Mr. Thinsell, and what were you doing in St. Stephens?"

"I came from New York."

"Never been there. Went to St. Johns once but only stayed a day. Too many people there. Too many in St. Stephens. Used to live there, but when the third family moved in, I moved out. Don't like crowds. Jean and I have lived by the side of this lake for nearly fifteen years. She was just a little thing when her folks died, so I took her and we have lived it alone together since then. She is as fond of the woods as I am, and she is a good hunter, too. The girl can take care of herself, but that is not worrying me. She is going to be alone when I leave."

"Don't worry about that," Thinsell replied, "because both of you have a friend now, even though he is a tenderfoot. If anything happens to you, I will look after Jean. I may have to leave now and then but I will come back every month or so."

The old man laughed,

"You are a tenderfoot and a real one. Shows what you know about our winters. It's September and soon the snow will start. Been times when nothing showed of this cabin but the chimney. Alone in the woods you would die. Better get back when you can."

"I am not going back," declared Thinsell. "I don't want to. I came here because I wanted to and I am going to stay if you and Jean will permit me to do so. I may be of some help."

"You are welcome. Now get out and go fishing with Jean. I have things to think about and I want to be alone. I want to think and I always think best when I am alone."

CHAPTER VII

THERE REMAINED a few glorious days. The golden brown of oak, maple and birch, mingling with the multicolored evergreen, changed the mountains surrounding the lake. Finally they

seemed to be covered with a Paisley shawl. Thinsell and Jean fished, tramped through the woods, shot an occasional deer, and talked. But talking gradually seemed an unimportant form of social activity. For hours they were happily silent. Though the man's hair remained white, the deep lines of worry, carved in his face by the chisel of experience, grew fainter. He learned to laugh again.

There were hours when he almost forgot just why he had come to New Brunswick.

One day he was forced to admit that Johnson was growing weaker and might die at any time. Against his desire he forced himself to question him.

"Mr. Johnson," he said, "I came to this part of Canada to find you. There are some questions I wanted to ask you. Do you remember guiding a party of six young people more than a year ago?"

"I certainly do. It was my last party. I took them into the woods and brought them out again safe and sound. They were nice folk and paid me well for my service."

"Do you remember the man called John?"

"Very well."

"One day he had a headache and you gave him two capsules of medicine. Is that right?"

"Yes, but how did you know it?"

"His fiancée, the girl you knew as Agnes, wrote about it to a friend in New York and I saw the letter. Now what I want to know is—where you got those capsules and whether you have any more?"

"Let me think. . . Oh, yes. Told you I went to St. Johns and spent a day there. I was feeling bad. Too many people and it hurt my head. Saw a doctor and he gave me a piece of paper. Took it to a store and they gave me a dozen of those white things and charged me plenty for them. I took two and brought the rest back. Now and then I would take one. When John complained of headache I remembered them and gave him the last two. What about it?"

"Nothing special. Just interested.

Now about John. During the two weeks you guided the party did he eat anything unusual, something the other five or yourself did not eat?"

"No, we all ate the same grub. Of course he might have found some wild berries or something like that in the woods, but I do not think so. I cautioned them all not to eat anything without asking me; some of the berries are good to look at but make folks sick."

Thinsell felt as though he had dropped one hundred floors in an elevator without stopping. He had spent months, traveled hundreds of miles, to investigate those two capsules, and now he found himself in an impasse. If the old man had taken ten of the capsules they could not have been the cause of the Red Death. Of course the old man might have been immune but it was hardly likely, practically impossible, that doctor and druggist were both tied up in a world-destroying conspiracy. Some other cause must be found for John's illness!

"Think it over, Mr. Johnson," he urged. "Here is my reason for insisting on it. John went back to New York and died. He had a strange disease and infected the other five of the party and they died. I have always thought that he contracted his illness when with you."

"You mean," said the old man, sitting up in bed, and very angry, "that I poisoned him?"

"No. Nothing of the kind. You have killed animals and perhaps sometime you may have killed a man in self defense, but I cannot imagine your deliberately poisoning a man. But something happened to this man John while you were with him. Something that did not happen to the other five. And I want you to tell me what it was."

Johnson sank back on the bed and kept his eyes shut for a long time. Finally he called,

"Jean! Come here. Look through my hunting pack. In it you will find a little glass jar, like a pepper shaker. Bring it to me. It has a piece of paper with writing on it, and the writing is in red ink, *vegetable salt*."

Jean found the shaker and brought it to her grandfather.

"Now, this man John was pernickety in his eating," the bear-hunter explained. "He did not like the way I seasoned the food. For my taste, salt and pepper is good enough for anyone and the rest of the party never complained about my seasoning. So one day I wearied of his constant talk and happened to remember this shaker; so I hunted it up and handed it to him and told him to sprinkle it over his potatoes and see if it would make them taste better. He used it once and handed it back to me, and said he did not like it. So I put the other top back on. As far as I know that was the first and last time any one used it and here it is."

Thinsell's hand shook as he took the piece of glass.

"Where did you happen to get hold of this? Certainly not in a store!"

"No. It was given to me. There was a nice old man came here salmon fishing. Don't know why he did that because up in the Gaspé country, where he said he lived, there is the best salmon fishing in the world. One night he said to me, 'Johnson, sometime you may be guiding someone who does not like just salt and pepper and then you have them use this for seasoning.' I stuck the jar in my pack and John was the first and last tenderfoot to try it."

"Do you remember the name of the man and where he lived?"

"Sure. My mind is all right even if my back is weak. He was an odd sort of fellow, a little old and moody-like. Have a salmon on his hook and he showed some interest in life. Most of the time he just sat and sat."

"But his name?"

"Odd name. Henry Van Dorn. Sounded to me like a name he made up instead of being christened with. Said he had been living by himself for many years. Made a map of the country and showed me just where his home was. The map is around somewhere. Said if I ever got lonely or in trouble I should hunt him up. Jean will remember him. He used to sit by the hour and look at the girl without saying a word. Odd man,

but he paid good for my time. Now you get out and let me sleep. Snow is in the air and I guess I want to start sleeping like my bears do in the winter time."

Thinsell left him. To Jean's astonishment he took the little shaker, put it in a tin can and covered it with melted lard.

"That is a very important can," he explained to Jean. "Take good care of it and if anything happens to me take it to that little colony on Bay St. Pierre, the place I told you baby Rose is. I am going to write a letter and you give the can and the letter to Dr. Thornton."

"Nothing is going to happen to you!" said Jean, with a catch in her throat.

"Of course not. But just remember what I am asking you. Now you go and sit with your grandfather. He looks sick to me."

EARLY the next morning Johnson woke, called Jean and asked her to call Thinsell.

"I want you to leave us alone for a while," he told the young woman. "I have things to talk to him about."

"I think I am going on that trip, Mr. Thinsell, and there are some things that have to be said to you before I go. About Jean. She is not my real granddaughter, just adopted and cared for by me since her parents died."

"This was the way it happened. The three of them had me guide them one summer. Jean was just three years old. We were in as wild a part of the woods as there is, were going to summer there and for a while we had a fine time. They were nice folk and Jean was a darling child. I taught her how to swim. When I take a party out, I always write down their home address and the names of their kinfolk, but this time I did not do this because the man simply said something that sounded mighty odd to me. 'The world is our home and we have no one who cares anything about us!' They both died the same day, went down a rapids in a canoe when they had no business to do so without me in the boat, and the canoe turned

over. That left me with Jean. She never knew but what I was her real kin. Never told her about it. I buried them and marked the grave and put it on a map and brought Jean back. There was no one to write to about it.

"Her mother was a nice lady, also named Jean. Big Jean and Little Jean we called them. Her father was Paul Horton; at least that is what he called himself, but he told me one night after the women were asleep that it was not his right name; just one he used and as good as any. Guess he had been in trouble of some kind and was trying to forget it.

"I often wondered just who they were. They must have been somebody, out in the world, because she had a lot of jewelry and he had considerable gold in his belt. I kept it all for Jean and you can find it after I go hunting. It is all in one of my chests; never used a bit of it; never had much use for money; did all my trading at St. Stephens and they were glad to take my skins. You take care of Jean, because she will miss me and she is a nice girl. She would make a good wife to any hunter."

A FEW HOURS later John Johnson went on his last trip through the deep, dark woods. Sadly the two young people buried him in the forest by the lake he loved so much. For a few days nothing was said about the future. Then Thinsell rather timidly broke the ice.

"Have you any plans for the future, Jean?"

"No. But I think we will have to stay here, or get away as soon as we can. In a few weeks there will be three feet of snow in the forest."

"I want to travel, Jean, and at the same time I do not want you to be alone here."

"You can't travel by yourself, Harry." This was not the first time she had called him by his first name. "You would die in the woods at this time of year. If you have to go, I am going with you. And if you have to go, we better start, because the winter is cruel here."

"Of course you could stay here in

perfect safety, Jean." Thinsell said confidently. "There would be no danger. There is food enough and lots of wood. It is just the idea of your loneliness."

"Then why not stay with me till spring?"

"I have something to do. I want to go and see a man, and his name is Henry Van Dorn. Your Grandfather went salmon fishing with him a few years ago. There is a map showing where he lives somewheres in this cabin. Suppose you stay here and I will go and see him and then come back?"

"Find a man in this country with a home made map? Find him in the winter time? Get back here? It is impossible," the girl said with a little smile. "Of course you know more than you did when you came here, but I still am going to refuse to let you go wandering through these woods by yourself. But suppose we look for that map."

For two days they searched, finding many things that Jean did not know were in the three rooms, but no map. There was only one little chest unopened and this was locked. Jean suggested smashing it with an ax, but Thinsell refused.

"You get breakfast," he told her, "and I will work at the lock. Seems a shame to destroy such a fine piece of wood work."

To his surprise he had no difficulty prying the lock open. There he found what he expected. Some of her mother's clothing, the jewelry, and the belt of gold pieces. At the bottom was the searched-for map, an X showing Van Dorn's house. No doubt about that. His name was clearly printed there near the X. A heavy black line ran between the X, and what seemed to be the Johnson cabin. Thinsell replaced everything in the chest, put the lid down and showed the map to Jean.

She looked at it critically.

"He lives better than three hundred miles from here. I have never been up that far but I can find the place. When do we start?"

"As soon as you say."

"Going to let me go with you?"

"Yes, and I'll tell you why. As far

as I can tell from the map, Van Dorn lives only about a hundred miles from Bay St. Pierre where those Kansas people, Dr. Thornton, Miss Crabtree and Baby Ruth are. I will either take you there and back-track to Van Dorn, or you can leave me at his place and go on by yourself. You understand that if this man is living, I may spend the winter with him, and this is especially probable if the weather gets bad. We will travel with as little as possible and live on the country. You select what you know we will need, and we'll start tomorrow."

Their intentions were good, but in an hour it began snowing and kept on snowing for three days. It was not an ordinary snow but one that left their world covered anywhere from five feet on the level to twenty-five feet in the hollows. It was a soft snow through which travel was an impossibility till sun and frost made a hard crust. There was nothing to do except wait. A few days of sun and then more snow, and more, with cold wind and short days. Jean said never a word about the trip. Thinsell knew nothing could be done.

She showed him how to set traps and preserve the skins. He read to her. It was surprising what good literature her grandfather had; not many books but classics. The days passed swiftly. The two might have been father and daughter, brother and sister, or looking at them as they strode through the woods on snowshoes, just two pals. Nothing was said, nothing was done, to show that they were rapidly falling in love. Perhaps both knew it but both felt that nothing should be done to disturb the status quo of their friendship, at least not at this time.

CHAPTER VIII

ALL THAT WINTER Harry Thinsell spent much time thinking over the problem of the red death. He realized that no discovery on his part could restore the lives of the millions who had died from that disease. At the same time he felt that someone, someday, should be able to tell the few scat-

tered survivors just why mankind had been swept, as though by a tidal wave, off the earth.

He had finally told Jean the story of New York, and the part he believed John Johnson had played in it, even though innocently. He was confident that the bear hunter knew nothing about the debacle of humanity, had died without realizing that he had been one of the links in the chain leading to the world disaster. In the course of the story, it became necessary to explain just why he wanted to find the man of mystery, Henry Van Dorn.

"I don't think I can rest till I have a talk with him," he said. "In my detective work I have been wrong as often as right. For all I know, Van Dorn may be as innocent as your grandfather was. The death of the first six may have been purely accidental. The man who was the first to die may have eaten something in the woods that poisoned him. We have only one fact of any value, and that is he seasoned his food once, and only once, with this seasoning given your grandfather by Van Dorn. As I see it, there is no way of experimenting with that seasoning. Some man might be brave enough to eat some and go off by himself in the woods and find out what would happen, but it looks as though we need all the men we have left.

"It seems to me that the best thing would be for us to start going north in the springtime, as soon as you feel it safe to travel. We will try and find this place where Van Dorn lives. Once we locate it, we will go on to Bay St. Pierre. I will leave you there and back-track to Van Dorn. You will be heartily welcomed by my friends, and I will have nothing to worry about as far as your safety is concerned. After I finish with Van Dorn I will meet you, and then we can make definite plans for your future. How does that all sound to you?"

"All right," replied Jean, "except for one thing. Why do you feel you have to take me to St. Pierre? Why leave me when you see Van Dorn? Why do we have to be separated and have you face the danger alone?"

"There is no danger, Jean. I am simply going to talk to the man."

"How do you know he is alone? He might have other men there with him. If he is responsible for the red death he is bound to be dangerous, and certainly if he feels that you suspect him. Let me stay with you. Suppose we compromise."

"No. I am going to have my way. I want this problem settled as soon as I can do so."

"Well, then, if you have to, get through with it as soon as you can. You ought to be able to make the last hundred miles alone. We'll part at Van Dorn's house and I will go on to the colony. When you finish you can join me there. How is that? Are you going to take a gun?"

"Only a revolver."

"Then be sure to put it up against Van Dorn before you shoot. You would miss him at ten feet. You never have learned to hit a target."

"You have the advantage there, I admit, but remember that you have been shooting since you were a little girl."

"Now just as soon as you think we can travel you say the word and off we go. I will write a letter introducing you to Miss Crabtree. She'll be just like a mother to you."

"Don't need a mother, Harry, as much as I need—something else."

"I know, clothes and all that sort of thing, but you will be well taken care of."

"Sometimes I think you are just stupid."

"Bet I am. This must have been a hard winter for you—with just me for company."

"It was, in many ways," sighed Jean.

A WEEK later the two left the cabin that had so safely and comfortably housed them during the long winter. The snow was melting rapidly, though it was still deep. Snowshoes were necessary. Jean was as much at home as Thinsell had been on Broadway. She had a compass but never looked at it. She directed every part of the journey, the time of starting, stopping, shelter for the night and the meals. At Thinsell's

suggestion they deliberately avoided all the little towns on the map. Not traveling fast, soft at first from the relaxing influence of the winter's inactivity, they made little distance for the first week. Gradually Thinsell's muscles hardened, and Jean increased the distance covered each day. Day by day they traveled more and talked less. At last, from the top of a mountain, the girl pointed to a little cluster of buildings.

"There," she said softly, "is the home of Van Dorn."

"Then here is where we say goodbye for a little while."

"Looks that way. I have gone over your pack and you have enough food to last you. You should know how to build a fire and cook a meal by this time. When you finish with Van Dorn go due north. Take the compass. Keep on going until you reach the St. Lawrence and then follow the coast line west. That is the best thing for you to do. I will take a short cut and should be at Bay St. Pierre in three days, but it may take you twice that time. If you fail to come, I am going to come back for you."

"I'll be there. Goodby and good luck, and thank you for everything you did for me this winter."

He turned and started down the mountain.

"You forgot something, Harry," the girl called after him.

"What is it?" he asked, turning towards her.

"Oh! Nothing, I guess. Yes. There was something—the compass."

She handed it to him.

"Thanks," and once again he started down the mountain.

This time she let him go.

"I suppose I'm just a silly, romantic child," she said with a frown. "For all I know he may be desperately in love with that Miss Crabtree. He thought she was rather fine. Just because he was nice to me and read poetry to me after supper is no reason for me to think he was in love with me. If he wants to be away from me, he has had his wish. So I guess there is nothing for me to do except to go on with my plans and

see what happens at the end of the trail."

CHAPTER IX

INCE at the edge of the woods Thinsell paused. Down in the little valley, surrounded by meadows, were three stone cabins and a log barn. Smoke was pouring out of their chimneys. The meadows were still covered with snow. He realized that against this snow he would be an easy target, so he decided to wait till the night would cover him. He went back into the woods, built a rough shelter, hung his food on a limb, safe from animals, ate some cold food and waited. Towards dark he went to the edge of the meadow. Lights showed from one of the cabins.

"If there are dogs there, I won't get near that cabin without their barking at me," he muttered, "but that is a chance I have to take."

There were, apparently, no dogs. Thinsell slowly worked his way to the lighted cabin and looked through a window. An old man sat at a table writing. The reporter judged that if there were not two old men in the little settlement, and if this was the right place and if Van Dorn was still alive, this would be the man he was looking for. He could not be sure, could only hope. He went to the other cabins and peered in. They seemed to be unoccupied. The barn was empty of live stock.

He went back to the cabin and knocked at the door.

He heard the man walk across the plank floor and lock the door. Nothing more! He decided to call.

"I am a stranger looking for a Mr. Van Dorn," he shouted. "Can you tell me where he lives?"

"What do you want to see him about?" cried a voice.

"I have news for him from John Johnson, the bear hunter."

"Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

The door opened.

"Come in," said the old man. "Take off your things. Any friend of Johnson is a friend of mine. How is he?"

"Not so good."

Thinsell was thinking fast now. He did not know anything definite about this man; had only guessed that he had something to do with the red death. He did not want to show his hand till he found out about the cards Van Dorn held. He had not played poker for many years without learning something about the same. And, if Van Dorn was implicated, this was going to be *some poker game!*

"Make yourself comfortable," urged Van Dorn. "Tell me about the old guide?"

"You haven't seen him recently?"

"No, not since I went salmon fishing with him. The fact is that I have not seen anyone for nearly two years, but I don't mind being alone. The neighbors used to visit me very occasionally but they stopped coming over a year ago. About that time my short wave set broke down so I have been out of touch with the world for a long time. You are the first man I have talked to for just about a year and a half."

"You must have been lonely."

"A person would think so, but I had lots of food and lots of wood and a great deal to occupy my mind. Where are you from, and just how did you find me?"

"It's a long story. Perhaps it had better keep till tomorrow."

"It is early. Unless you are tired, I am naturally curious to hear about the old guide. He was a fine old man, peculiar, but in every way a gentleman."

"He was all of that. I only saw him once, the day he spent at St. Johns. You see I am interested in the Chamber of Commerce there and the old man met me when he was down there ten years ago to arrange for an advertisement as a guide. I wrote to him often after that and grew to know him. All last year I never heard from him, so this spring I decided to look him up. My friends didn't like the idea. They said, 'Hanson' — my name is Peter Hanson. They said, 'Hanson. You can't find Johnson without a guide. Better wait till summer.' But summer is my harvest time so I started out, and I guess plain pride in not being a

hundred percent tenderfoot made me go in alone from St. Stephens.

"At last I came to his cabin and found him. Just as I expected, or feared, he was dead. It was not a pleasant sight. He was in one bed and in the next room was his granddaughter and she was dead also. No telling how long they had been that way."

"Both dead?" asked the old man, slumping back in his chair.

"Absolutely dead! And their bodies as dry as though they were mummies. I couldn't bury them because the frost was in the ground and plenty deep, so I placed them in one bed, covered them with a blanket, and when I go back I will put them in the ground under a pile of stones."

"That is too bad," muttered Van Dorn, "really too bad. He was a good old man and his granddaughter was beautiful, really beautiful. Go on. Where do I come into it?"

"**I** HUNTED around and found some things Johnson had written after he knew the two of them were sick. He mentioned you and spoke of a map, and asked anyone who found them to hunt you up and tell you about the girl, and what his idea was about their sickness. In his writing he told about the girl's parents and the jewelry her mother had left when she died. You see, he was not her actual grandfather. When her parents died she was just a little thing and he adopted her, and raised her as his own. He had intended to talk to you about her and see if you could not find her people, but for some reason he had never done so. When he became sick he regretted this and thought you might be interested and do some investigation. He wrote that you were rich enough to do that. At the time he wrote, the girl was still well and he hoped she might not contract the disease. So, out of the jewelry, he picked a locket containing the pictures of her father and mother, and he asked that this be taken to you. He wanted to know if you would come and get the girl.

"It all seemed rather sad to me, seeing the girl he loved so much was

also dead. But of course he did not know that would be the case when he wrote. Anyway, I decided to take the map and find you, so here I am."

"That is all very interesting," murmured Van Dorn. "Very interesting and very sad. Now, you said something in regard to Johnson's idea of his illness. How about that?"

"Oh! I guess that was just the imagination of a sick man. When he became sick he tried to reason out just why, as he had always been very strong and well. Thought it might be something he had eaten. Finally his granddaughter confessed that she had sprinkled his potatoes with some seasoning you had given him when you were fishing with him. He never said anything to her about it, but he thought it might be that seasoning. He went and threw the rest of it in the lake. Of course it was just an idea of his but he asked anyone who found his writing to mention it to you and get your opinion on it."

"A sick man, as you say, is apt to have a lot of peculiar ideas. I remember about that seasoning. It was made of mixed herbs and tasted something like celery salt. I told him that he might have some city people with jaded appetites who would tire of just salt and pepper and he could season their food with it. Never thought for a moment that he would use it. Of course he never did but the girl used it for him. But that could not have killed him."

"Of course not. Not just mixed herbs. It must have been some contagious disease, because the girl caught it from him. They both died of the same disease; of that I am certain."

"Too bad. They were nice people. You say you are from St. Johns? How are times down there?"

"Fine. City is growing every day. Lots of new people. The depression is over and folks are spending their money. I really should be back home because every day I am away from there now is costing me just so much money."

"Has there been very much sickness?"

"Practically none in the last year. The death rate is actually falling."



"That is good," said Van Dorn, "very good. Now tell me something more about Johnson and the girl. You say they both died from the same disease? Are you sure?"

"That is a hard question to answer positively." Thinsell was looking at the old man's hands, but they seemed to be safely folded in his lap. "I do not know anything about medicine, but there was something queer about their bodies. Growing from the chest of each was a large red tumor, perhaps a cancer, and it was blood red and shaped like a toadstool. There was a stem, and at the top of the stem was a large red ball probably four inches in diameter. I never read of such a thing growing out of a human being, but it must have been some form of cancer. Its appearance was horrible; perhaps the fact that I am not a physician made me react

more to the sight than had I been accustomed to the changes disease makes in the human body. It must have been highly contagious, but fortunately no one had been near them till I came."

"You say that the tops of these tumors were still hard?"

"They seemed to be. Of course I did not touch them."

"Not dry or broken?"

"No, seemed to be like wax."

"It is all very strange," mused Van Dorn, "but you must be tired. Let me get you something to eat and then go to bed."

"I have had my supper. If you can put me up for the night I will stay here. Tomorrow I must be back on my way home. I forgot about the locket. Here it is, and if you want the other things in the chest I will

send them to you." He handed over the little round locket.

VAN DORN took it. Simply took it and put it in his pocket. He showed Thinsell where he might sleep. The New Yorker placed a candle by the bed. He took off his coat and shoes as though starting to undress. It was his idea to keep awake and have his revolver ready for any emergency. It was impossible for him to determine just how Van Dorn had reacted to the imaginary tale. Had he been telling the truth when he said he had heard nothing from the world for many months? Did he know that Thinsell had been lying in almost everything he had said? If that was true, if he knew the real facts about the red terror, had been the monster who had started it on its destructive course, then he would not hesitate to kill Thinsell. A man who had killed billions would not stop at making one more man leave the world.

The reporter knew that he was playing a most dangerous game. He might be pitted against a man who was cunning, desperate and undoubtedly insane. He was not sure but that he had overbid his hand; he wondered if he had been wise in refusing to take the food offered him. He had done so because he was afraid of being poisoned, but had the old man intended to do so? And would Van Dorn realize the suspicion and see that the story was a network of lies?

There was nothing to do except pretend to sleep, to stay awake and hold on to his revolver. Pulling a blanket over him he started to snore first softly and then in increasing volume. The sound must have soothed him for he went to sleep. When he woke he found to his dismay, that the sun was beaming through the bedroom window, and also, to his delight, that he was still alive. He put on his shoes and coat and walked into the next room. There he saw Van Dorn on one side of the center table and a stranger on the other side. On the table were several small glass jars, a few notebooks and, almost in the middle, a blood red toad-

stool, an exact copy of the thousands he had seen on the bodies of dying and dead New Yorkers.

Van Dorn looked up, smiled, and asked Thinsell to sit down at the table. He made, at that time no reference to the other man, who seemed to be asleep.

"I have a story to tell you this morning, Mr. Thinsell," he began, "and I think you will find it, in many ways, far more accurate, and even more interesting than the one you told me last night."

"Excuse me, my name is Peter Hanson."

"That, as far as I can see, is of little importance. You are you no matter what you call yourself. First I want to tell you something about myself. Van Dorn is my right name, and I am a physician, but more than that, a biological scientist.

"For many years I have been living here working on the cause of cancer. Yesterday you saw a barn and three cabins. I kept my experimental animals in the barn and two of the cabins served as my laboratories. I isolated myself far away from the rest of the world because I was afraid that I might discover something that would be dangerous to humanity. My work was pointed only towards the relief of mankind from a disease that no one thus far had conquered.

"You said you were not a doctor and that part of your story is true, at least I think so. It is therefore useless for me to give you details of my experiments, or indicate just what I was trying to find out. It is sufficient to state that for some years I tried to inoculate animals with a deadly form of toadstool, the wax model of which is on the table.

"I published a very few preliminary reports of my work and as a result an Italian physician, Dr. Viletti, visited me. He asked for permission to stay and work with me. We had long conversations and when I realized that, along some lines, he was my intellectual superior, I accepted his offer. We worked together for three years at the end of which we were able to inoculate sheep with this toadstool. The plant grew inside of

them, and when it flowered it did so just as though the plant had been growing in the ground. We carried the disease through many generations of animals till we knew that it could perpetuate itself.

"It is needless to say that in this work we protected ourselves. First we wore rubber gloves and masks, and then, working on a protective serum, found one that would keep animals from being infected, and took it ourselves. It worked very well, and at last we were not afraid even to breathe the air containing the dust from the dry and exploding fruit.

"I thought that we had found a new form of cancer, transferred by our skill from a wood parasite to something that could live generation after generation on mammalia. My final idea was that a serum protecting men from this new cancer might protect from other forms.

"That idea sounds slightly illogical," interrupted Thinsell. "Of course I am not a physician, but I thought there were different kinds of cancer. Did you think it would work in all kinds?"

"I did not know. My idea was that I would take a supply of the blood serum from my protected sheep and go to some city such as New York, and secure permission to try it on some very early cases of the different types.

"One day, when we had reached a solution to most of our problems, Dr. Viletti calmly announced that he was going to leave. I had no right to ask him to remain, and so I permitted him to go without any argument. I even urged him to carry on our work; he took a pint of the antiserum with him when he left.

"Now I want to tell you something else. I am very fond of rare and unusual seasonings. Before I came here, on a vacation trip to Italy, I found one made of many dried herbs. I was so pleased with it that I bought a pound. On my way here, I bought several salt shakers and filled them with this seasoning. I used it rarely but when I did, I enjoyed it as much as the first time I tasted it. I always took a shaker of it with me when I

fished or hunted. It was one of those shakers that I gave to John Johnson.

"Last night, listening to your story, part of which I know now is not true, I was completely at a loss to account for the death of Johnson and his granddaughter. There was no doubt in my mind as to the cause of their death but I did not see how they became infected. It was not a pleasant story to listen to but when you told me that you were the only one to see the bodies and that the toadstools had remained hard and not exploded, and when I saw you were still well, I realized that the danger of an epidemic was past. I determined to ask you to burn the bodies on your return instead of burying them.

"After you were asleep I started to think, as best I could, because I was decidedly upset over your story. But I arrived at no scientific or logical reason for their dying from this new form of cancer, unless, of itself, this parasite had been able to form a new and unusual habitat.

"Then, without any warning, Dr. Viletti walked in.

CHAPTER X

"I WAS GLAD to see him. From past experience with him I knew that his mind was in many ways more keen than mine. It seemed to me that he might be able to help in the solution of the problem.

"But before I could begin to talk about it he started with his own story. It was, and even you will have to admit that, though you can tell a rather good story when you want to do so, a very unusual tale.

"After he left me he had bought a small island, isolated some miles from the coast of Maine, and supplied it to last for some years. He placed in his cabin a very reliable short wave set, and then he waited. For what? For a world disaster he felt sure would happen sooner or later.

"As I talked I realized that the man was insane, had been insane all during the time he worked with me. But I never dreamed of it all the time we lived together. Not till last

night—will you excuse me if I take a drink of brandy? I am rather shaken."

"You might give me some," said Thinsell. "I don't feel any too well myself."

"What he told me convinced me of his insanity. Since his college days he was certain that the hand of all mankind was raised against him, thwarting him, depriving him of greatness. Therefore he determined to kill humanity. But he was not certain of the proper method. The fact that his father's death made him wealthy made his insane ideas worse because he found that wealth did not bring him the scientific recognition he craved. Then he read one of my little preliminary reports and decided to join me.

"The time came when he knew that we had discovered a new disease, one that was very deadly and very contagious. We knew that this disease could be spread in different ways but we also knew that the most deadly thing about it was the dry powder from the exploding toadstools.

"And now he showed his cunning. He was really fond of me and knew that I was immunized against the disease. I am sure that he did not want me to die from it. He knew that I went hunting and fishing with guides, and he also found out that I always took with me a bottle of that Italian seasoning, and often gave some away. He told me all this, very slowly, so I could be sure of my part in the drama.

"One day when I was away from the cabin, he took a quantity of the dry dust from an exploded toadstool and mixed it with the seasoning in every shaker. Last night he explained to me that he was confident that after many generations of growing in the body of mammals it would not start growing on the dry herbs. Of that, of course, he had to take a chance.

"Then he left me and hunted a place of shelter on that island. He said that it was lonely at times and hard for him to wait and find out what was going to happen. But he stayed there and kept in touch with the world with his short wave set,

Months passed and finally the news that he was waiting for came. A new disease had begun to kill people in New York and spread all over the world with great rapidity. He felt that at last he was revenged on humanity for the way it had treated him.

"He took a long time to describe this epidemic. The thing that pleased him most was the fact that no one could ever trace it to him. This pleased him, but it hurt his vanity. He had done something big in the world and what was the use of it unless someone knew that he was the hero of it all?

"Then he told about the shortwave broadcasts from New York by a radio reporter by the name of Thinsell. He admired and at the same time feared this man. And then, after all in the city were dead except the reporter, a doctor, a nurse and a baby, and they were preparing to leave the city, he became afraid of this man. He thought that Thinsell would try to find out what had started the destruction of mankind, afraid that finally he might find me and that in my innocence I might talk about him.

"But it seemed to me that he was equally afraid of something else, and that was that he would not be the first one to tell me of the success of the experiment. His pride was involved there. He wanted me to know about it, and from him, rather than anyone else. At that time he slipped on the rock and hurt his leg and by the time it healed winter set in; but just as soon as he could travel, he came here.

"I knew that I was dealing with an insane man, one who would kill one man as casually as he had killed billions. It occurred to me that you might be Thinsell. So that the only way to save your life was to not let him know you were here. I started to laugh, and that was not hard, because I was rather hysterical.

"**H**E ASKED me what I was laughing about and I told him. That he had been ahead of me, and that my entire work was based on the hope that I could find some

way of exterminating men as rapidly as if they were ants being poisoned. The only difference between us, I told him, was the fact that he had gone ahead with the ant poison while I waited, and yet that I deserved some credit because I had given the deadly condiment to a John Johnson, a New Brunswick guide, who must have spread it.

"He decided that it was all a good joke and called for a drink. I went and poured out two glasses of brandy. In one I placed thirty grains of chloral. Looking into the room from my bedroom, where I kept my drug case, I saw him comfortable by the fire, reading. Then something caused me to take that locket you gave me out of my pocket and open it and look at the picture of Jean's parents. Dr. Viletti was still reading. I reopened my drug case and shook a lethal dose of morphine into the glass. We drank to each other's health, and then we sat here at the table laughing and talking. He died during the night but I tied him to the chair with a rope so he could not fall. He is in rigor mortis now.

"Now I think you are Thinsell, but no matter what your name is, I want you to take this story back to whoever are still alive in the world. I do not want my good name spoiled by any part in it except what is true. I admit that I was the instrument by which Johnson and little Jean died and, before their death, infected others.

"I am Thinsell," admitted the reporter, "and I am willing to say that part of my story last night was not true. I wanted to find out what part you played in all this before I told you what I knew. But I am sorry that you felt you had to kill the Italian doctor. If he was insane he was not responsible."

"It had to be done. He would have killed you had he known you were here. It was his life or yours."

"No doubt you are right. There is one thing that I have to ask you. What part did the locket play in your final decision?"

"That was the most bitter part of it. That locket showed me something. The woman in it was my

daughter Jean. For years I had never seen her; her mother and I separated when she was a baby. But she used to write to me and after she married sent me her picture, asked if she could bring her husband and visit me. I was still bitter in regard to her mother, and never answered that letter. I never received a second. No doubt she thought it useless to write.

"All my life I have wanted someone to love. When I went fishing with Johnson, I used to look at little Jean and wonder why she looked so much like my daughter. Now I know, but it is too late. She is dead. After thinking of all the misery I innocently caused the world in trying to free it of the menace of cancer, all I have accomplished is a terrible destruction which included my own granddaughter. There was nothing left for me to do. And I have done it."

"But it is not too late," cried Thinsell. "What I told you was—"

He never finished the sentence. The old man had slumped forward on the table. Thinsell realized that he was dead.

CHAPTER XI

VAN DORN'S death was almost too much for Thinsell. He walked towards the cabin door.

"I have to get out of here," he muttered to himself. "I thought I was doing something fine in finding a solution to the problem of the red death. But in doing it I was the indirect cause of two more deaths."

He came to an abrupt stop just inside the doorway. A number of men were coming across the meadow. Friends or foes? He couldn't tell, but for some reason, he did not like their looks. Some quick thinking had to be done, rapid action taken. Instantly he recalled the fear all living men had of the epidemic. Perhaps he could use that fear!

Working rapidly, he took Van Dorn and threw his dead body on the floor. He untied Viletti and placed him on the floor under the table. He undressed to the waist, seized the wax mushroom and ran over to the

fireplace. There he took some ashes and rubbed his face and chest, heated the stem of the mushroom, fastened it to his chest and lay down on the floor with eyes shut.

He heard steps outside the cabin, then voices. Then one above the rest.

"Don't go in that cabin! Two men dead and the third dying of the plague. Keep away from them or we will all get it!"

There was a loud discussion outside the cabin, but no one entered. All the visitors seemed to be talking at once. Finally one voice cried,

"We might as well get away from here. Let's go on with our plans and raid St. Pierre. We will be able to kill the men before they know what is going on. Then we will have all the food and women we want."

The voices gradually died. Thinsell cautiously went to the door. He could see the men walking across the meadows, northward. Saved, himself, he realized the danger threatening his friends and the little colony. But what could he do? Certainly something, but what? At least he could follow their tracks and at the last moment reach St. Pierre before they did and warn them of the danger. In the soft snow it should be easy to track that many men. He wished Jean were with him. She could almost walk blindfolded through the woods!

It did not take him long to find his pack, hidden in the woods the day before. He discarded everything he could, since he wanted to travel light. Then he picked up the trail. It was far easier than he had any reason to suspect, as the party ahead of him had no reason to conceal it, having left not only footprints but other things behind them.

"Wolves, plain wolves!" muttered Thinsell. "If they ambush the men of St. Pierre they will act like wolves. I must get there in time. They might even kill baby Rose. What use would they have for a baby?"

HE BECAME bolder. For four nights he saw their campfire. The next morning, from the top of a mountain, he saw them a few hundred feet ahead of him, through the

brush and trees. Then he saw the bay in the morning sunshine, and a little group of buildings on the shore. The men came to the edge of the woods. Beyond it was meadow land. Men, women, little children were walking in the street.

To Thinsell the situation seemed hopeless. By making a wide circle he might reach the colonists before the men started their attack, but it was a forlorn hope. It would take time, and of time he had little. If he could get close enough to them he might kill a few with his revolver, but what good would that do? At least the sound of shooting would warn his friends of the danger. It was worth trying.

Throwing off his pack, he cautiously walked towards the edge of the woods. He was close enough to see the men. They were on the edge of the meadow. He aimed at one of them and hesitated. Perhaps it would be better to come a little closer to them.

Thinsell raised his revolver. Just as he was prepared to shoot, he heard a voice behind him.

"Don't waste your ammunition, Harry. Let me handle this."

He turned and cried, "Jean!"

"None other," answered the young woman. "Now suppose we see what kind of a shot I am?"

She raised her rifle and began firing. The distance was short, her marksmanship perfect, her rifle an automatic. One after another the wolves dropped. The men of St. Pierre started to fire. Caught in a crossfire, the raiders started to run back into the woods, towards Thinsell and Jean. She pulled Harry behind a rock and kept on firing. Only one man reached the rock. Thinsell jumped up. They were only three feet apart and the reporter used his revolver.

He turned and took Jean in his arms. Woman-like, after the danger was over, she started to cry. Thinsell, without clearly realizing what he was doing, kissed her.

"How did you come here?" he finally asked.

"I never left you. I have been behind you all the time!"



IF WE SKIMPED on the Cosmo-scope last issue it was due solely to the amount of space that Martin Pearson's article on space-flight took up. We had to drop about half of this letter department to fit that in. But we'll try and keep it good and solid in the future. Which, by way of starting, is to say we welcome your letters of comment on this issue of *Cosmic Stories* and will print as many as we can fit in. One more word: when you write, address your letter to The Editor, *Cosmic Stories*, 19 East 48th St., New York City. Many people have been writing our printing office in Holyoke, Mass., instead, and thus their letters are delayed.

And so, on to Joseph Gilbert of Columbia, South Carolina:—

On hand and read with interest are the first and second issues of *Cosmic Stories*. Two things seem to be rather certain: (1.) it is unquestionably in the top ranks, and (2.) the second issue is quite a bit poorer than the first.

It started out well enough. Blish redeemed himself for the almost unreadable "Citadel of Thought" with a tale, which, though old in theme, was done with the skill and smoothness of an experienced professional. Nothing exceptional, but good readable fiction.

Gottesman seems to be slipping. Being clever is always something of a strain, and making a living out of it must be even more so. Raymond's "Power" is the very first story by him that I've ever really liked. He made an error in phrasing the story in the first person, how-

ever; it gave the tale an egotistical tone not particularly pleasant.

"The Riddle of Tange" smelled of mould. Outworn plot, and a stilted style that would have been ludicrous had it not been correspondingly and exceptionally dull. It, as we say in the vernacular, stunk. Just plain stunk.

"No Place to Go" was well done and rather satisfactory. "Time, Inc." was hash. God, how many times have I seen that—mad laughter receding into the distance—plot! But Chapman is improving.

"The Improbable" rates first. A genuinely humorous and thoroughly enjoyable piece on the order I like best. Much better than Corwin who, judging from "What Sorghum Says" hardly seems to be the same person as the chappie who wrote the super "Thirteen O'Clock." Not that "What Sorghum Says" was a bad story. It wasn't. But it certainly did not show many signs of the lad most of us had listed as the white hope of 1941. Tanner, on the other hand, did a very nice job of writing on a delightfully screwy plot.

Couldn't wallow through "New Moon," though in fairness to Wells, it might be parenthesized that I dislike this type of story extremely.

"Transitory Island." See comments on Gottesman. But, nevertheless, the entire Columbia Camp joins me in yelling for more Wilson. Ye-a-a-a-a-a-y, Dick! Sis-boom-bah! Rar-rar-rar! Too many stf mags don't hit par! Ra-a-a-a-y, Wilson!

In other words, we guys want more Wilson. Do we get it?

Don't like the idea of articles my-

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COSMIC STORIES

self unless you can get one as good
as "So You Want To Be A Space-
Flyer?" If you can, it's fine by me.

That's about all. There are now
six sf and fantasy mags on the
stands worth reading. Two are re-
prints, and of the remaining four
SSS and Cosmic make up half the
number. That, I believe, is what one
terms, "Doing the Impossible."

A good long letter, rating the stories
and saying why. The kind of
communication we like to receive.
We are sort of confused about your
rating of Wilson. You say of him
"See comment on Gottesman" and of
the latter, you said he was slipping.
Yet you want more Wilson? We
can't make it out. Now enter our
old timer, old reliable Stafford Chan
of Darien, Conn.:—

"Power" is the best tale in the
second Cosmic by my way of think-
ing. One thing puzzles me, though.
Is the civilization described in "Re-
birth of Tomorrow" and "The Last
Viking" supposed to have grown out
of the new order brought about by
"Power?" I think Raymond should
write a few more stories showing
the development of the future world
he depicts.

The cover is much better this time,
though I still wish you would use a
single background color as you did
on the Stirring covers. One com-
plaint only: don't you think that
stories starting with "Grab for the
sky, scum," growled Madoap Izzie as
he sighted down his delacourt .45
are being a little overdone in your
pages? Two by Gottesman, and Cor-
win seems to have been infected.
Please administer an antidote before
the plague gets out of hand.

We don't know whether Hugh
Raymond had the same civilization
in mind in "Power" as in the other
stories you mention. It's entirely
possible of course, and we'll make
an investigation. Mayhap we can
work out a whole future history
some day through Raymond's stories.
We are noting, incidentally, the grad-
ual rise of a Hugh Raymond boom.
Better keep your eye on him.

A query from Eugene L. Meade of
Camp Shelby, Miss.:—

(Continued On Page 110)



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- Total Sex Intercourse.
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- When Husband and Wife Cannot Keep Pace.
- When to Have Intercourse.
- The Right to Refuse.
- Pregnancy.
- When a Child is Wanted.
- Sex Relations During Pregnancy.
- Intercourse After the Change of Life.
- Truth About Birth Control.
- Sex Adjustments Before Marriage.
- Special Care of Sex Organs.
- Temporary Loss of Sex Power.
- Video of Love-Play.
- Driving One's Lover into the Arms of Another.
- Sexual Diseases in Women.
- Sexual Stimulation Methods.
- Signs of Sex Deeds.
- The Unresponsive Wife.
- The Sexual Night.
- Positions for Sex Intercourse With Recommendations.
- Principles Sex Union.
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- Impotence.
- The Frigid Wife.
- Making the Hymen Lose Its Power.
- Sexual Insanity.

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(Continued From Page 108)

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C-1

In the May, 1941, Issue of Cosmic Stories, there is, on page 68, mention of a book "The Star Maker," by Olaf Stapledon. I should like to read it and its forerunner "Last and First Men" as mentioned in the same article. Can you advise me as to where I may either purchase or else rent a copy of either or both?

Having received several other queries in kind, the information is this. "The Star Maker" was never published in the U. S. A. Its only edition was one published in 1937 by Methuen & Co., of London, England. Cost of that was 8s. 6d. We fear it would be difficult to obtain a copy today due to the war. "Last and First Men" is available for 25c from Penguin Books, 41 East 28th St., New York City. It was also published here in 1931 in a \$2.50 edition by Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith.

Basil Wells of Springboro, Penn., comments:—

Thought I'd write in and comment briefly on the last Cosmic just received. I see that Mr. Chan from Darien, Conn., wonders if I am a new writer, and, I imagine, where I dug up such a pseudonym. Well, it's no pseudonym, I've carried it for sundry years and only once before has it appeared under a story title. If that isn't new I'd like to know. And I write stories because I like to. If the readers don't like 'em, I don't give a hoot—I'll just write a better one until they do. Birdshot and griping get more results than salt and compliments. I hope the readers keep panning your authors until they turn out "Skylark Plus Fiction."

I see that you are using practically a hundred per cent new authors this issue. That takes plenty of nerve although it will undoubtedly pay out in the end. The Gernsback Amazing back there in the late '20s had to pioneer as to authors, plotting and such. But even they dropped in an occasional Merritt, Burroughs, Verne, etc. So, even though I may seem to be working against us newer scribblers, I would favor the inclu-

(Continued On Page 112)

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COSMIC STORIES

(Continued From Page 116)

sion of one or two established authors among the offerings of fiction. That's just my idea though, so forget it.

We use new writers because we are trying to develop a high quality and style of our own. We will use the older writers, too, when they give us stuff that satisfies us as properly "belonging" in our magazines. We have set out to obtain a certain standard and a certain following and to do that we have to mold our own writers. It's not unique; if you think about it, most established magazines do so. And that's a cue, too, for those of our readers who are trying to get a start writing. Don't just write a yarn and then sling it blindly at the magazines; carefully work it into a style and temperament to fit the magazine you are aiming at. But our writers, for the most part, are not amateurs. Almost all of them have sold to magazines other than our own. Which usually proves that they can master more techniques than one.

Enter upon the scene W. Kermit Conway III, of Torrington-on-Hudson, N. Y., who deposes and says:—

Three cheers for Corwin, Wilson, and Lowndes. That's what stf needs these days—whimsy. Corwin in the style of "Reversible Revolutions," Wilson in the style of "Transitory Island," and Lowndes in the style of "The Martians Are Coming." Let's see some more of the old old stories burlesqued in future issues. While, on the serious side of the fence, "Mecanica," "Power," "The Last Viking," and "Phoenix Planet" are more than satisfactory.

More letters in the letter column, please; more pictures for the long stories, more stories by Wollheim, Gordon, Basil Wells, and Lawrence Woods.

Now a letter from Ray Garfield of St. Louis, Mo.:—

Your magazine is shaping up quite nicely and developing a reader following of its own. Your May issue compared quite favorably with your excellent March number and I am personally pleased to see that some of my suggestions were carried out—

THE COSMOSCOPE

coincidence I suppose, but anyway. . . .

It seems to me that there is a flaw in Edward Bellin's little yarn "No Place to Go." The idea was unique and I do not recall it as having been advanced before. Also I might say that it seems to be quite logical and probable if, as higher mathematicians seem to have proved, gravity, magnetism, and electricity are kin. Since magnetism and electricity have positive and negative poles, it ought to hold true for the third member of the group—gravity. And it is also true that if we are located in the field of one gravity-charged body, we can never measure or find anything in the field having the opposite charge.

But the flaw in the story is this: if Gallacher's ship was charged with Earth gravity and if Mars was charged with a like form, he could not approach Mars, true! But neither could he return to Earth and for the same reason! Earth would repel him as strongly as Mars would. So that Gallacher could never have returned to Earth and would have been compelled to wander forever in the void. Unless he could find a planet charged with an opposite polarity in which case he would probably crash at an uncontrollable speed!

"So You Want To Be A Space-Flier" was a riot. And seems to be quite logical and quite true. It's about time someone took cognizance of the facts. Hugh Raymond's "Power" is good writing; you have a find there. I seem to recall reading other works of his recently with considerable pleasure. Cecil Corwin's yarn was not up to his wilder work but still enjoyable. I predict that Corwin and Raymond will fight a close battle for the position of who is to be the big find of 1941.

The next issue of *Cosmic Stories* will be out July 1st. We aren't able to estimate yet the leading stories in the May issue. For future issues we have some interesting and fine yarns lined up and we trust you will not miss any. Thanks for your letters and we'll be seeing you!

—DAW

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